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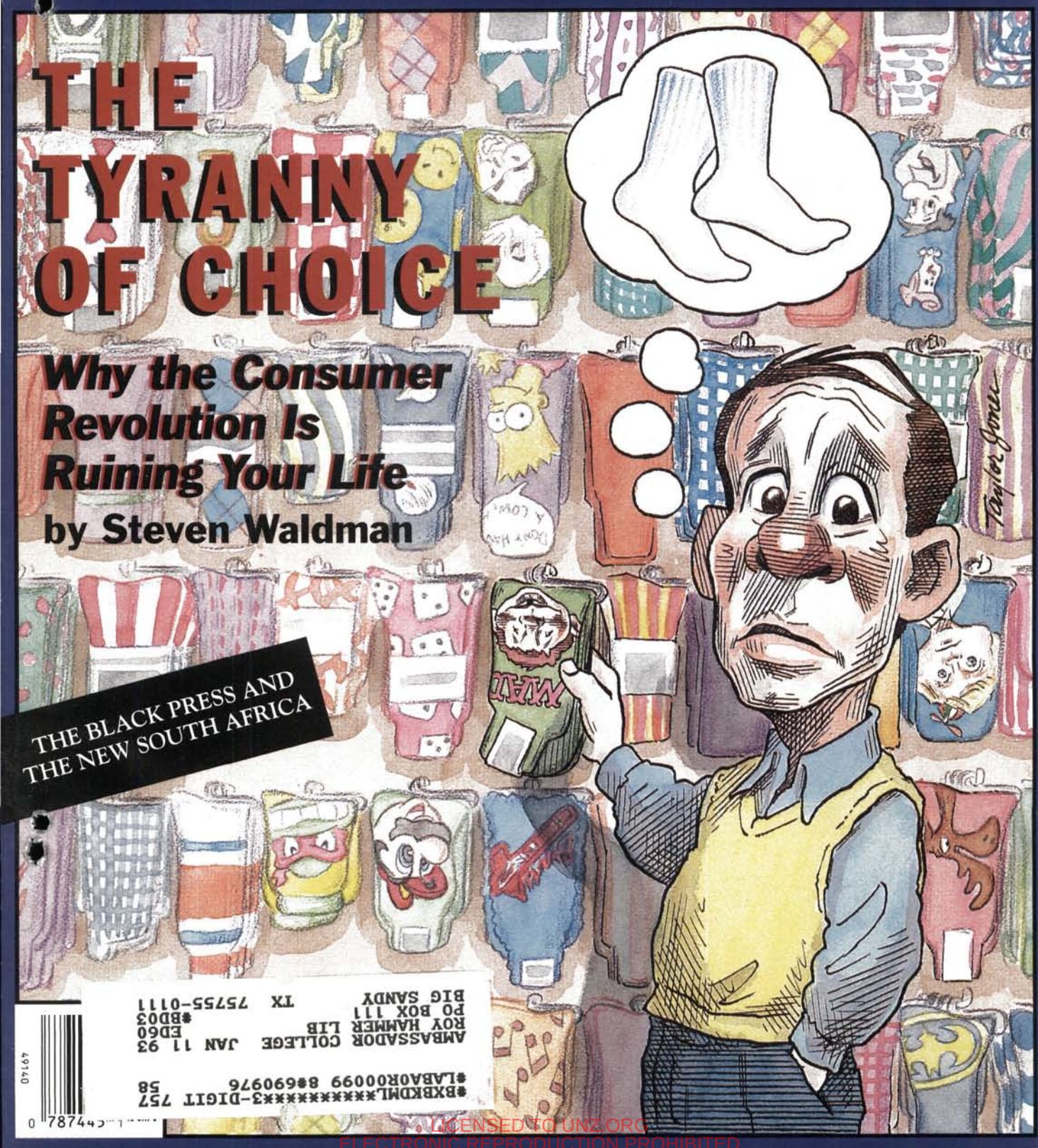
THE TYRANNY OF CHOICE
Why the Consumer Revolution Is Ruining Your Life
by Steven Waldman
THE BLACK PRESS AND THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA
Taylor Jones

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

JANUARY 27, 1992

FOUNDED 1914
WASHINGTON, D.C.
ISSUE 4,019

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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 206, Number 4, Issue 4,019, January 27, 1992. (Printed in the U.S. on January 8, 1992.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated Jan. 6 & 13, July 13 & 20, Aug. 17 & 24, and Sept. 7 & 14, 1992) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. The New Republic/National Review joint advertising (212) 702-4882. Yearly subscriptions, $69.97; foreign, $99.97; Canada, $84.97. Back issues, $3.50 (includes postage & handling). © 1991 by The New Republic, Inc. (ISSN 0028-6583). Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Microform, CD-ROM, issue and article copies are available through University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone 1-800-521-0600. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscribers: Please send all remittances, changes of address, and subscription inquiries to Subscription Service Dept., The New Republic, P.O. Box 56515, Boulder, CO 80322. For subscription problems call 800-274-6686.

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CORRESPONDENCE

For the boys

To the editors:

In his homage to boys' schools ("Romeboys," December 16), Michael McGough points out that coeducation has yet to produce its *A Separate Peace.* Even if that were so, I think the preppy protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye* sums up my five years in an all-male school best when he says of them that "they don't do any damn more molding ... than they do at any other school. And I didn't know anybody there that was splendid and clear-thinking and all. Maybe two guys. If that many. And they probably came ... that way."

As for the strong male-bonding experience McGough argues boys' schools engender, my class has its twentieth reunion coming up this year. The last I heard, out of my thirty-six classmates, only two guys expressed any interest in showing up.

MARC KORNBLATT
Madison, Wisconsin

To the editors:

Michael McGough quotes John Pidgeon of the Kiski School reciting the tired old argument that the opposite sex is a "distraction" during high school. Distraction from what? High school is a lot more about growing up and developing an adult identity and sense of responsibility than it is about classroom learning. If you have not had a healthy socialization to the opposite sex during high school, you can look forward to immature posturing, fear-driven antipathy, and bad sexual judgment in college: a time when you may lack the support systems of friends and family, and when learning *should* be the primary focus of your activities. Those high schoolers who are not "walking around with wacky haircuts trying to look like Charlie Cool" will be doing this in college while their coeducated compeers are pursuing their studies (and each other) in a relatively level-headed manner.

F. JACKSON LEWIS
Monte Rio, California

My Mario

To the editors:

I read Jacob Weisberg's article on Governor Cuomo and the Albany press corps ("Mario's Calling," December 2) with great interest, mostly because I was the governor's press secretary for almost three years. As any Albany reporter can attest, if you take a cheap shot at Mario Cuomo, you can expect to be told about it.

Weisberg wrote of the "press war" in 1986 that found Cuomo at odds with reporters from *The New York Times* and *The Daily News,* among others. The impression was left that the trouble emanated from press coverage of his 1986 re-election campaign, which is simply not true. While he wasn't exactly enthralled by the campaign coverage, there would have been no "press war," or anything approaching a serious problem, if *The Daily News* had not decided to compete for the prize for all-time cheap shots with a screaming headline that Governor Cuomo's son was under investigation by the Bar Association for unethical conduct on a complaint from a notorious political gadfly. The accusation was later deemed frivolous by the Appellate Division, and dismissed. But *The Daily News* had done its damage to the governor's son, who had graduated from law school only a few years earlier. Did the governor have something forceful to say to several editors of the *News*? You bet.

Weisberg quotes Jeffrey Schmalz, the Albany bureau chief for *The New York Times,* as saying the governor offered him exclusive stories if he would "play ball." I've never known Mario Cuomo to operate that way, at least not when I was his press secretary. The rule was that *everyone* got the story at the same time. Leaking stories to favored reporters and media outlets may give an elected official a slight edge in the short run, but the practice is destructive to good press relations in the long run.

The governor treats reporters and editors as he expects them to treat him. He expects them to be as careful with their words as he is with his. Mario Cuomo lets a thousand careless phrases go by without comment, but if he sees or hears something that is a gross error or deliberately unfair he wants his press office to let that reporter know about it. And he occasionally will pick up the phone and do that himself, just as he sometimes dials his own calls, or answers his own phone. Why does he do those things? Because he believes that if you let someone get away with a cheap shot, you can expect another one.

MARTIN J. STEADMAN
Garden City, New York

Separately unequal

To the editors:

There may be good arguments against school finance equalization—spending as much money for students in poor school districts as for students in rich districts—but Peter Schrag ("Savage Equalities," December 16) hasn't found any. Schrag argues that *Serrano* v. *Priest* (1976), California's equalization suit, ruined the state's school finance system by stripping local school districts of the incentive to tax themselves to fund their schools. This, in turn, caused overall school funding to decrease, according to Schrag.

In fact, *Serrano* had about as much influence on these phenomena as it did on the fall of the Soviet Union. The culprit in California was Proposition 13, not *Serrano.* It was Prop 13 that eliminated local fiscal control of California school districts. Enacted by the voters in 1978, it imposed a limit on property tax rates and expressly prohibited school districts (as well as other local governments) from exceeding that limit. Thus, Schrag is wrong in arguing that "equalization sharply reduced local incentives to raise taxes"; Prop 13 makes it *illegal* to raise local property taxes.

Nor can equalization be blamed for the overall relatively low amount California spends for education. Prop 13 reduced state revenues for schools by $2.8 billion, or one-third of all the money that was being spent on schools at that time. It was this shortfall, not *Serrano,* that required the state to assume primary responsibility for school funding. No large school district in the state, not even fabled Beverly Hills, can raise enough money to run its schools by levying the maximum tax allowed by Prop 13. The state must make up the difference.

Of course, during the fourteen years Prop 13 has been in effect, the legislature and governor could have but did not raise state taxes sufficiently to bridge the educational spending gap between California and other states. You can hardly blame a tax revolt, a weakening economy, and a failure of political will on a court decision that says kids in poor districts should have equal educational opportunity.

In other states without a Prop 13, it is possible to equalize school spending without eliminating local fiscal control. For example, a state might allow districts to continue levying property taxes for education, while setting up a mechanism to ensure that a poor district could raise the same amount of money as a rich district with the same tax effort. California adopted such a mechanism in 1977, but it never took effect because of Prop 13.

RICHARD A. ROTHSCHILD
Los Angeles, California

The writer was one of the counsel for the plaintiffs in *Serrano* v. *Priest.*

Merely great

To the editors:

I could hardly recognize the Edward Bennett Williams described in Jill Abramson's "The Unwise Man" (November 25) as the man with whom I

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was proud and challenged to practice law for three decades defending the constitutional rights of the accused. In a review devoted largely to matters of wealth and purported power in Washington, Abramson mentions almost in passing the central fact of her subject's career: "Williams ... was merely the greatest criminal lawyer of his day." Would she likewise have said "merely" if describing Williams's predecessor in this ·dle, Clarence Darrow?

The "law-and-order" crowd will be pleased at Abramson's description of Williams's using "innovative legal technicalities to win [reversals of conviction] on appeal." Those so-called legal technicalities are of course the constitutional protections of our Bill of Rights. True liberals and true conservatives will applaud those victories, and not share Abramson's concern with whether the defendants whose rights were vindicated were wealthy or powerful or had surnames ending in vowels.

Nor does Abramson choose to mention that "the important Fourth Amendment argument before the Supreme Court" to which she devotes a paragraph—describing the most-cited constitutional precedent among Williams's victories—was presented in a case briefed and argued *pro bono* by appointment of the Supreme Court on behalf of indigent Asian-American defendants (*Wong Sun* v. *United States*).

ROBERT L. WEINBERG
Washington, D.C.

Urban plague

To the editors:

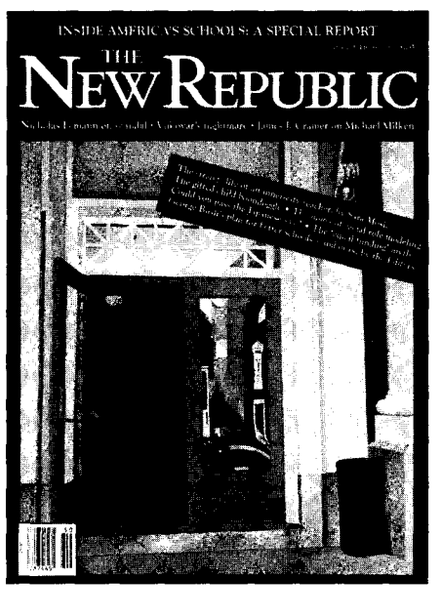
"Deathly Silence" (December 2) by Clarence Page was way off-base. Contrary to the picture it paints of a national black leadership indifferent to AIDS's devastating impact on African Americans, the National Urban League and other national institutions have been active in the fight against AIDS.

I have personally been engaged in alerting the community about the dangers of AIDS ever since it emerged as a threat to African Americans, mentioning · in my talks at community events throughout the nation, writing about it in my weekly newspaper column, and serving as co-chair of the Citizens Commission on AIDS for New York City and northern New Jersey.

Since 1988 the National Urban League has run a National AIDS Minority Information and Education Project (NAMIEP) to assist our affiliate network in developing community-based AIDS information, education, and counseling programs. Some sixty-four Urban League affiliates run programs targeting African Americans and those at greatest risk, including teenagers, drug users, the homeless, and women. Many of our affiliates work with service providers to develop culturally sensitive programs; others are engaged in AIDS coalition efforts that include African-American churches among other community institutions, and still others provide family counseling, support, and medical services.

JOHN E. JACOB
New York, New York

The writer is the president and chief executive officer of National Urban League, Inc.



Teacher testing

To the editors:

I felt your otherwise thought-provoking commentary on "America 2000" (December 16) suffered from some unnecessary abuse of organized teachers. You proclaim rightly that "demonstrably incompetent teachers are an enormous barrier to educational progress." True enough, but is tautology an argument for policy? Incompetent lawyers are an enormous barrier to legal progress; does that warrant yearly testing? Why not subject federal justices to periodic recertification?

I suspect that none of the implied strong-arm unionism nor bureaucratic laziness is responsible for opposition to competency testing. I suspect it is more due to a natural human suspicion for any device that assigns a numerical value to what is essentially an art form. We can no more rate and compare the rapport or inspiration of an instructor than we can give Beethoven a 95 and compare it with Schubert's 82. Worse, we are likely to produce a class of cynical teachers who concentrate on honing skills necessary to pass an exam rather than those necessary for their personal effectiveness.

If incompetent teachers are a pervasive problem, as you suggest without substantiation, how did they get certified in the first place? By the same rubber-stamp procedure with which you will now recertify them? Sounds like fighting bureaucracy with bureaucracy to me, a demoralizing policy sure to hasten teacher burnout.

JOHN F. KELLY
Boulder, Colorado

Descartian vortex

To the editors:

Keith Hindell almost got it right in his article "Leap in the Dark" (December 9). In it he proposed that Robert Maxwell might have fallen victim to calenture and, not unlike one of Melville's imagined sailors in *Moby Dick*, gave a "half-throttled shriek" before plunging through the "transparent air" to his watery grave.

That's a nice literary allusion, but had Hindell placed Melville's language in its full context, he would have recognized that the novelist offers a different, perhaps even more convincing comment on the meaning of Maxwell's demise.

The Melvillean sailor who plummets to his death is in fact no sailor, but a philosopher, or at least one who "takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature." In him were heaven and earth merged, were sky and self one. That's a dangerous reverie, of course, should the sailor but move his "hand or foot an inch" and drop from his perch, for then "your identity comes back in horror."

Melville's was a not-so-subtle slap at contemporary transcendentalists, who occasionally mistook themselves for God, a slap that could be applied equally to Maxwell, who not infrequently suffered from a similar misapprehension. That would all be cleared up when on November 5 he took a free fall into what Melville called a Descartian vortex, and we know as the Caribbean.

CHAR MILLER
San Antonio, Texas

Heaven can't wait

To the editors:

Morton Kondracke points out that many movies are now being made that focus on life after death (Washington Diarist, "Ghosts," December 2). He might add that in many of them there is also splendid public transportation.

RALPH SLOVENKO
Detroit, Michigan

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FROM WASHINGTON

Can we stand Pat?

Patrick Buchanan will never be president of the United States for many excellent reasons and one bad one. The good reasons are obvious. The bad reason is that he has spent most of his adult life as a purveyor of political opinions, in newspapers and on television. Goodness knows I don't pine for a world where television commentators are routinely elevated to genuine power. But a political system that punishes strongly held and vividly expressed opinions—whatever their merits—has defects of its own.

Even now, "negative research" munchkins in the Bush campaign are undoubtedly plowing through thousands of Buchanan newspaper columns and television transcripts, in search of material. It's hard not to feel a bit sorry for Pat as you contemplate the embarrassment of riches available to them.

There is, to pluck just one example, his 1977 column in praise of Adolf Hitler as "an individual of great courage [with] an intuitive sense of the mushiness, the character flaws, the weakness masquerading as morality that was in the hearts of the statesmen who stood in his path." The column goes on to compare current-day statesmen to those flawed statesmen of the 1930s.

Is that column an indefensible defense of the indefensible, disqualifying its author from national office? Read in its entirety, including parts not quoted here, no. Read in the context of Buchanan's other writings on related matters, it becomes troubling once more. That's the usual pattern with Buchanan's more incendiary stuff: explainable taken alone, hard to explain taken together. But in a political campaign, the column will get neither reading. It will be boiled down to: Buchanan praised Hitler. Imagine what Roger Ailes could do with that, if necessary.

Of course the take-no-prisoners style of political campaigning is one Buchanan himself has promoted and participated in since Hitler, I mean since Nixon. So perhaps it serves him right. But does it serve us right? To be sure, as a man of opinions Pat Buchanan is an extreme case. But even as saintly and moderate a commentator as, say, David Broder has left far too many hostages to fortune to contemplate political office.

The psychology of the commentator and of the politician are completely different. A commentator must have opinions on everything and spew them like an open fire hydrant. Pat Buchanan the journalist needs dozens of opinions a week to fulfill his professional obligations. Furthermore, as a matter of character a good political commentator looks for things to say that will disconcert people, confound settled views, even give offense.

By contrast, what is a great line for a commentator is, for a politician, a "gaffe." A gaffe, as this column never tires of pointing out, is when a politician tells the truth. Not necessarily the objective truth, but the truth about what he or she really thinks. The serious presidential candidate must hoard his or her opinions, if indeed he or she has any. Each one must be shaped with care, the rough edges must be polished away, before it is produced. The fewer old opinions lying around out there, the easier it is to mold new ones to current exigencies.

Buchanan's problem is not merely his paper trail of old opinions but his commentator's reflexive tendency to say unnecessarily interesting things. Like a smoker, he knows he should quit but he apparently can't. Interviewed recently by the *London Sunday Telegraph*, for example, he explained his distaste for recent cultural developments with this anecdote about a visit by his wife to downtown Washington: "The other day Shelley went down Connecticut Avenue and these guys were sitting on the corner playing bongo drums. I mean, this is the town I grew up in." If it's possible to be charmed and offended at the same time, that's my reaction to this remark. Charmed by the double naïveté—about modern culture, about modern politics. Offended by the implication that people playing bongo drums (and we know who they are) don't belong in Washington.

And what about this, from the same *Sunday Telegraph* interview? "The U.S. should stand up for values, shared values. Why are we more shocked when a dozen people are killed in Vilnius than a massacre in Burundi? Because they are white people. That's who we are. That's where America comes from." The only faintly charming thing about this is Buchanan's touching belief that "we" actually do care much about those people killed in Vilnius. Pat thinks America not only shares his neoisolationism, but also shares his own Baltic and Balkan exceptions to it.

Nevertheless, give Buchanan this: unlike his rival for the Republican nomination, George Bush, he's got principles. True, they're mostly the wrong principles. But Bush versus Buchanan is a tempting illustration of the maxim that in some ways the wrong principles are better than no principles at all.

They're better, first, aesthetically. It is pleasing to see a candidate on the hustings promoting long-held beliefs with sincere passion. Of course, there are limits to this pleasure. Our friend Hitler was no fun for decent people to watch in action. But you don't have to agree with Buchanan to admire his straightforwardness (so far) when reporters ask him questions, or to cringe at the shrieky campaign style of George Bush when he tries to make up in pitch and volume what he lacks in conviction.

Second, the wrong principles at least create a focus for honest political debate. On issues ranging from civil rights to free trade, Bush has pursued a strategy of making clarity impossible. It's not just the politicians who like to avoid clarity; the voters do too. Buchanan will not promise to be the "environmental president." If he were the Republican nominee, America would not merely have the opportunity but would have no choice except to decide how much environmental protection it wants.

Third, there are some issues on which we might actually be better off seeing the wrong principles enacted than to continue in principle-free drift. Federal spending is one of these. For eleven years, two Republican presidents have been claiming to oppose the growth in federal spending without actually proposing the necessary cuts. Two trillion dollars of added national debt is the result. We can argue endlessly about whether spending should be reduced or taxes should be increased. But either solution would be better for the country than another decade of no solution.

Unlike other candidates who can prattle disingenuously about flexible freezes and bureaucracy and waste, fraud and abuse, Buchanan is on record, repeatedly, endorsing most of the genuine ways federal spending could be cut. Bring home all the troops. Eliminate foreign aid. End all farm subsidies. Cut Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, college loans, and so on. Now that he's a politician, he'll be strongly tempted to fudge, on this and other matters. Don't do it, Pat. We've got plenty of other reasons to vote against you already.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JANUARY 27, 1992

ALJEERS

The new world order is now only in its tenth month, but in the Middle East it already seems much like the old. In Lebanon, for example, which the United States had been complicit in turning over whole to Syria as a reward for feigning participation in the Gulf war, there was another vast and random death-happening, again occasioned by a car bomb lodged in a Mercedes parked in a crowded street in a Beirut slum. More than thirty innocents were killed and 160 wounded. No particular target was discernible, and no organization claimed responsibility. Anonymity served the purposes of almost all the belligerents in Lebanon: the Druze, Maronites, Iranians, Iraqis, Shiite ultras, their Sunni counterparts, the Palestinians, perhaps even the resentful gangs coerced into giving up their prized hostages. Anyone who suspects one of them now fears them all. Mission accomplished.

On the same day a car bomb also went off in Baghdad, outside a hotel. Few casualties this time, but no apparent objective or claim of responsibility either. The regime responded with a call for new public hangings, like those that, as *The New York Times* delicately put it, "helped assure the stability of Iraq's Baath party government after it came to power in a revolution in 1968." A year after the launch of Desert Storm, the regime is digging in.

Meanwhile, the fate of Algeria is a trauma for the Arabs. Algeria, we recall, was a "vanguard state." Its proximity to Europe, its leadership in the politics of non-alignment and Third Worldism, its flamboyant secularism earned it a special place in the modern Arab imagination, and presumably a promising place in James Baker's new world order. Yet in the recent elections, fundamentalist Islam scored a chilling victory. This was a political, not a religious, coup, against a regime whose despotism had sealed its fate. What Fouad Ajami wrote when the Islamicists won the local elections in 1990 ("The Battle of Algiers," TNR, July 9 & 16, 1990) still applies: "The secular political parties were too feeble to mount a challenge to the rulers." And these secularists had been systematically enfeebled by the organs of state. The regime had emasculated all but the lay preachers and their followers among the young urban poor in the years before the elections, and it reaped the predictable harvest. So, in the end, it was either the regime or the fundamentalist *ulama*, particularly since the *ulama* had taken their grievances (and the grievances of others) into the streets. Given the cruelty and corruption of the state, the ISF, the one plausible opposition party, was virtually guaranteed a landslide.

So Algeria's "democratic elections" sealed a victory for a movement whose aims are intrinsically anti-democratic. What happened in Algeria is that the people were given the vote but had already been stripped of the mediating institutions that might—just might—have made democracy possible. "Democracy," said one of the divines this week, "is sheer idolatry." But it was a convenient tool with which he and his comrades might capture power. The regime chose the same tool to dampen discontent, but in the mistaken belief that it would win. Already the ministers of interior from the so-called secular Arab states have met to coordinate their challenge to the reign of virtue. Do not bet that the *anciens combattants* will permit the victorious Islamicists to come to power or stay in power if they are allowed to arrive there. And who could judge for the Algerians between the two evils, "the prison of the old guard," as Ajami put it, "or the merciless rule of the zealot?"

Those who stand surprised at such events, particularly those in Washington, neither understand the region nor grasp the broader world. They cling to the

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abstraction of states against the realities of nations and peoples and races and faiths. That is one reason why Messrs. Bush and Baker clung to the flimsy fabric of the Soviet Union long after men and women more alert to nationhood saw it for the frayed artifact it was; why, against the palpable facts of the moment and of history, they still cling to the abstraction of Yugoslavia; and why even now, they still prattle about the "nation" of Iraq.

What they don't understand is that a nation-state exists only when the mass of people in its territories feel it as their own. When they don't, their fidelity goes (or stays) elsewhere. Tyrannies can sometimes disguise this fact; terror can mute it. But it abides nonetheless, as the failed experiments in multiethnic, multisectarian and multinational sovereignties—in the Third World, especially—have shown. The authentic allegiances of such peoples, squeezed by other allegiances that are not truly theirs, ordinarily do not die but fester, and in a febrile atmosphere they themselves become febrile and are finally expressed in inflamed and extreme ways. This is what we have been seeing in the Middle East roughly since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

The other issue that eats at the foundations of countries in the Islamic orbit—such as Algeria itself—is the place of Islam as the arbiter of law and social norms. Certainly no Arab country has entirely escaped this vexing matter, not even Egypt with a most complex identity steeped in African antiquity. Although the most militant Arab secularists have scarcely been reluctant to manipulate Muslim symbols and sensibilities against their external enemies—the Jews or the Americans or, sometimes, other Arabs—their efforts at what we used to call "nation-building" has put them deeply, violently, at odds with the clerisy. This is the case with Hafez Assad and Saddam Hussein. The king of Jordan, he of the charmed life and long tenure on the throne, is now forced to navigate between the shoals of Palestinianism and fundamentalism. A military regime in the Sudan has discovered the wisdom of Sharia law, although the country's south is made up largely of animist Christians. And so it goes, from one Arab country to the next.

Algeria, the pride of the new nations, is, then, also lacking in the attributes of nationhood. The country is riven by wholly irreconcilable visions of politics, in neither of which the population as a whole believes. And yes, there is another deficiency in the national configuration. A quarter of the people are Berbers, not Arabs. They speak a different language and hail from different ancestors. And though the Berbers were militants in the war against the French, independence brought down upon them a brutal regime of Arabization that, thus far, has not succeeded in stifling the vigor of their yen to go their own way. While they are all Muslims, their form of Islam is highly idiosyncratic, almost heretical, certainly when it comes to commerce and the status of women. As a result the polar choices between the state as they know it and an austere Koranic dispensation give them no option at all. Both sides view them as enemy. They are, like the Kurds of Iraq, a permanent thorn in the hide of Arab Algeria (and, by the way, of Arab Morocco, too). When the two Algerias fall upon each other we may hear in the breach from the Berbers yet again. And then another nation-state, so-called, may dissolve before our eyes. But then, more shocking things have already happened in the new world order than that.

NOTEBOOK

BUSHISM BONANZA NUMBER ONE: "We're enjoying sluggish times, and not enjoying them very much." —January 2, on the economy

(thanks to Kenneth Silber, New York, New York)

WAIT, THERE'S MORE: "I mean a child that doesn't have a parent to read to that child or that doesn't see that when the child is hurting to have a parent and help out or neither parent there enough to pick the kid up and dust him off and send him back into the game at school or whatever, that kid has a disadvantage." —January 3, in an interview with David Frost, on family life

TAKE THREE: "Part of the great success was the fact we have an all volunteer army, and part of the all—the military. And part of the rationale is people will have more say in what they want to do. So a mother—I want to be a part of this. I can respect that and understand it." —*Ibid.*, on women in the military

ON THE QUAYLE TRAIL: Whole rain forests were sacrificed to print "The President's Understudy," *The Washington Post*'s well-timed seven-part profile of Dan Quayle by David Broder and Bob Woodward. What have the paper's leading political and investigative reporters concluded after their six-month study? Fasten your seat belt: Dan Quayle actually wanted to be Bush's running mate in 1988; his wife, Marilyn, has played an important role in his career; he is not as wealthy as some people assume; he was—yes—a "C" student in college; James Baker doesn't like him very much; and he plays a mean game of golf. Thanks to all these stunning revelations, Woodward and Broder believe Quayle has gotten a bum rap from the press. Well, the last part is half-true: the press has turned a second-rater into a laughing stock for its own solipsistic purposes. For our part, we think Jackie Mason got it just about right: Quayle is smarter than people think—but not by much. The question is whether the leading journalists in the country need to fell a minor woodland to make the point. Still more trees will expire when these revelations are packaged as a book. It will be published, we hear, by—who else?—Simon and Schuster.

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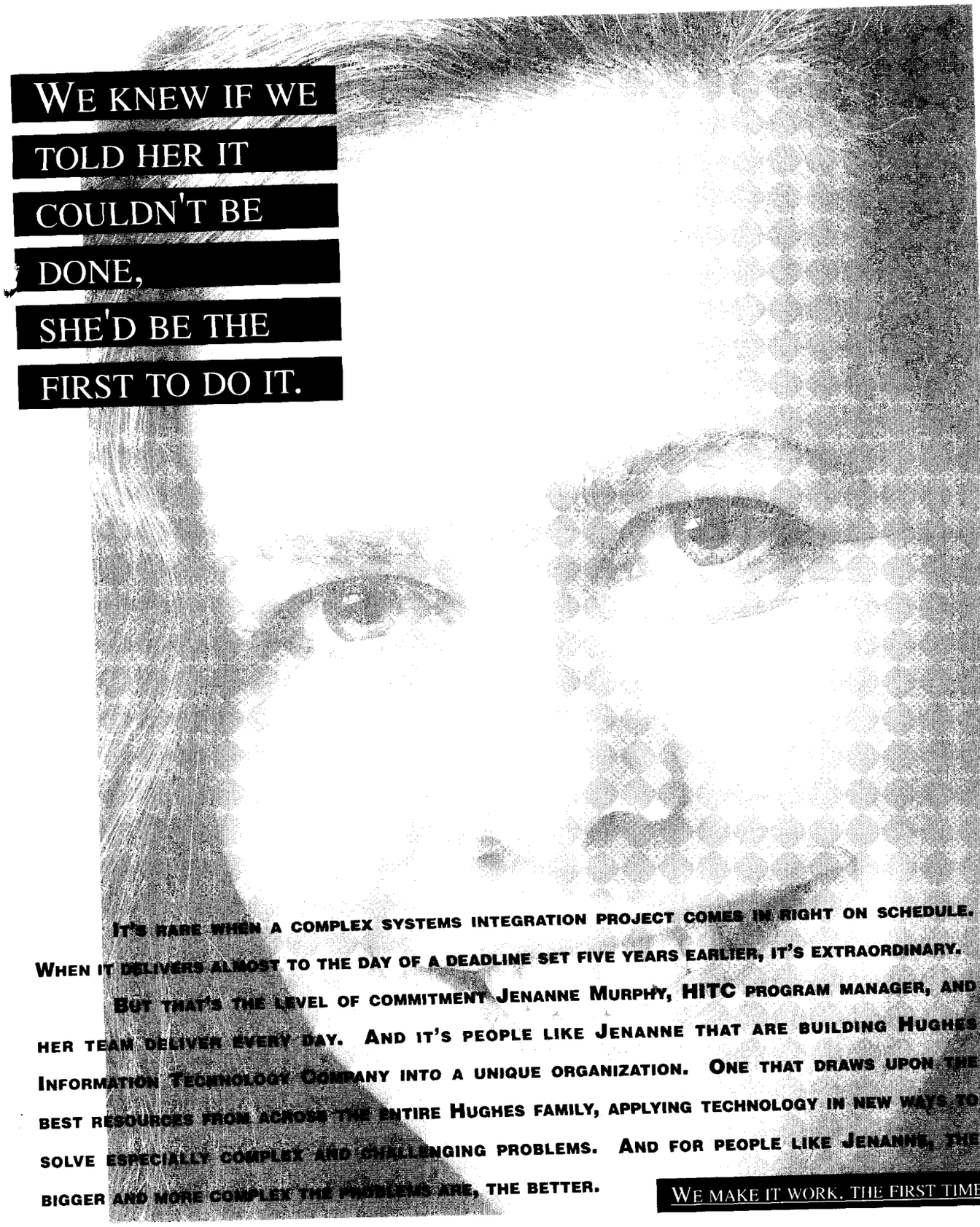

WE KNEW IF WE TOLD HER IT COULDN'T BE DONE, SHE'D BE THE FIRST TO DO IT.

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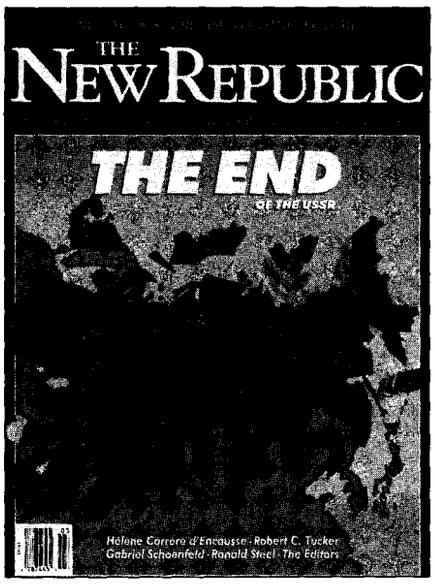

—TNR, January 21, 1991

Bad to the last drop.

MAXWELL'S HOUSE

By Tom Bower

In London's satirical rag *Private Eye*, there's a comic strip called "Cap'n Bob." It portrays the British media magnate Robert Maxwell, the gargantuan owner of the British tabloid *The Dai'* [illegible] and a var[illegible]

—TNR, April 8, 1991

WELL, HE SHOULD KNOW: What would you do if you were a former mayor of Washington, D.C., serving time in prison for drug-related offenses, with a reputation for sexual excess, a shameless denial of every misdemeanor, and plans for a political comeback? Marion Barry's response to this question, according to several eyewitnesses who spoke to *The Washington Post*, was to have a woman come to a prison visiting room and perform fellatio upon him in full view of other inmates and their guests. As the *Post*'s David Hilzenrath memorably put it, "Although sex in prisons is not uncommon, sex in a public visiting room is said to be highly unusual." The most sublime part of the entire escapade, however, was Barry's response. He accused the prime witness to the incident of being a "professional liar."

OVER THE LINE: We don't like the deportation by Israel of twelve Palestinians from the West Bank, but all the huffing about it—condemnations from world capitals, Security Council debates, protests from clerics—strikes us as disproportionate to the offense. The exiles are among those who have carried on a "civil insurrection" for more than four years. The intifada is not a mere challenge to the law; it's a war against Israel, in recent months a flagging war that its leaders are trying to keep alive with firearms and explosives. If the Western democracies were faced with this kind of siege, they would likely respond in the same way—if not more harshly. Other incursions into civil liberties among Israel's neighbors go unremarked. In the states bordering Israel, the police arrive in the dead of night, and men and women harboring dangerous thoughts simply disappear. In Egypt a novelist and his publisher and printer were just given eight-year prison sentences for putting out a book that parodies Muslim prophets. Deporting Palestinians—to Jordan, a Palestinian majority-country—seems a civilized punishment by comparison.

JESSE STONE: Oliver Stone isn't the only one who's been peddling marginally deranged conspiracy theories lately. No, we don't mean Gary Sick. Jesse Jackson's defense of James Earl Ray, the convicted murderer of Martin Luther King Jr., is remarkable even for Jackson. In the new prison-penned book *Who Killed Martin Luther King?*, Ray says that although he pleaded guilty at the time, he was an unwitting tool of the FBI and didn't shoot King. Although Ray's publisher, National Press Books, has been accused of fraudulently inventing blurbs for the back cover, no one fabricated Jackson's introduction to the book, in which he says Ray "deserves a full and fair trial" and states: "I have always believed that the government was part of a conspiracy" to kill King. His case for Ray's potential innocence rests on the claim that "Ray had bungled virtually everything he had ever tried, including criminal activity"—hardly a statement that instills confidence. Of course, Jackson is no stranger to revisionist accounts of the day King was shot. We look forward to the movie.

BOOM YEAR: In 1991, it turns out, THE NEW REPUBLIC enjoyed something of a production bonanza. In the summer and fall, senior editors Ann Hulbert and Robert Wright became the proud parents of Clare Suzanne Sestanovich and Eleanor Moselle Wright, respectively. Not to be outdone, just before the old year was out, our managing editor, Dorothy Wickenden, gave birth to Rebecca Anne Weiser. In her absence, senior editor Jacob Weisberg will be manning the deck.

OOPS: We neglected to change the volume number on the first two issues of the new year. The issue of January 6 & 13, 1992, should be Vol. 206, Numbers 1 and 2. The issue of January 20 is Vol. 206, Number 3. •

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Sex and the single Singaporean.

UNSTUDLY

By John Chua

SINGAPORE

Singapore is a country obsessed with rankings. It proudly boasts of having the world's busiest port, most profitable airline, cleanest subway, and most productive workers. But if ever a world ranking in romantic expertise is made, the men in this tiny, economically successful nation will surely be placed near the bottom. Indeed, poking fun at the sexual incompetence of Singaporean men has become a national pastime. A popular office cooler joke goes like this: "Put two Englishmen with a beautiful woman on a deserted island and they will fight for her. Put two Frenchmen with a beautiful woman on the island and they will share her. Put two Singaporean men with a beautiful woman on the same island and they will wait for the government to tell them what to do."

To the government, however, the sexual inhibition of Singaporeans is no laughing matter. Or to be more precise, the sexual inhibition of smart Singaporeans, a steady supply of whom, it is believed, is necessary for the economic and political survival of the nation. Lee Kuan Yew, the founding leader of Singapore and now senior minister, first spoke of the "problem" of unmarried female college graduates back in 1983. The charismatic Lee, who guided the nation from a virtual backwater to a modern metropolis with a standard of living second only to Japan in Asia, even suggested polygamy as a solution to the problem of superfluous educated women. The pragmatic politician reasoned that one educated male could impregnate several educated wives, an efficient process in a country obsessed with productivity. Since then and continuing under Lee's successor, Goh Chok Tong, the government has been finding diverse ways to get the educated to have more children.

So far, so good. The birth rate is increasing, a function perhaps of the constant barrage of print and television commercials that show happy Chinese yuppies enjoying quality time with their children, sometimes with the memorable jingle: "Fun, fun, fun, fun ... Families are fun, fun, fun, fun ..." But the birth rate—alas!—is highest among the less educated and the poorer minority races—not exactly the targeted groups of the campaign. Indeed, a survey published in *The Straits Times* last June indicated that 37 percent of female college graduates over 25 remain unmarried, an 8 percent *increase* since 1980.

Men are not the only ones taking the rap for this problem. In 1990 Dr. Vytialingam Atputharajah published a landmark study of more than 1,000 women that concluded that many women, including educated ones, are ignorant of their bodies. Thirty-three percent of the women with more than ten years of education found out how pregnancy occurs only after leaving school. Forty percent did not know how to use contraceptives. Atputharajah, a prominent gynecologist at Kandang Kerbau Hospital, Singapore's major medical center for women, routinely sees married women who come to him complaining of being barren but who turn out to be virgins. Other common problems include not knowing where the vagina is, pain during sexual intercourse because of lack of foreplay, and non-consummation of marriage. As he puts it: "So many just don't know where to put what. Many men grope in the dark." The longest case of marriage not consummated that he has dealt with was thirteen years.

Educated women are also blamed for being too choosy and insistent on marrying men with equal or better qualifications. But the real reason for the elite birth dearth may be that traditionally, Chinese men prefer submissive, less educated women. Wives earning more than husbands are perceived as a challenge to manhood. And women complain that the men long used to the comforts of living at home and being pampered by their traditional Asian mothers have no desire to get a wife.

The government's task is therefore very basic—getting men to meet and date women. Singapore's Ministry of Finance is perhaps the only ministry in the world to provide a dating and marriage service available to any single college graduate over 21 years old. Not since the Nazi era has a government gone into the business of social dances, grooming courses, and matchmaking just to increase a segment of the population. And in multiracial Singapore, where the Chinese are the economic and educated elite, this policy quietly attempts to maintain the status quo.

The ministry's Social Development Unit, or SDU, as the dating service is popularly known, offers all sorts of incentives to members, from subsidized "loveboat"-type cruises to personal grooming courses. Among the subtle ploys to get sparks flying are such techniques as putting couples in the same dinghy in monsoon-drenched sailing expeditions. Members who work for the government have the added benefit of being able to take paid leave to attend these activities. But by most informal accounts, the SDU programs are a waste of taxpayer money. At SDU-sponsored events, even with the chaperone's prodding, the two sexes remain cool to each other. One participant, Trixie Tan, who attended an archery course, found little mingling among the sexes. She notes that one woman who was "a bit aggressive" (she was more friendly toward the men) was regarded with suspicion and disdain by all.

On a recent visit to SDU's office, located on the fortieth floor of the Treasury building in the heart of the

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financial district, I posed as a recent college graduate who had returned from abroad and was interested in the agency's matchmaking service. I first had to sign a form attesting that I was not "going steady" with anyone. Obviously pleased at the sight of a potential male applicant (the rumor is that they're short on males), Susan Chan, a deputy director of the SDU, ushered me into an interview room and proceeded to quiz me on my sexual past. "Did I leave any broken hearts abroad?" she asked. "It's very hard for us to check on those who have lived abroad." Clearly the SDU is not geared toward those looking for a fling. "Are you gay?" she also asked. If I were gay I was obviously at the wrong place, if not the wrong country, as homosexuality is outlawed in Singapore.

Having passed all her requirements, Chan displayed the automated bureaucratic efficiency for which Singapore is renowned: "I have just the right person for you. She's vivacious. Her name's Veronica," adding somewhat apologetically, "she's a little fat but in a nice way." She was clearly hoping for me to inquire further and to perhaps ask for Veronica's phone number. But like most Singaporean men, I was decidedly noncommittal.

Perhaps the failure of SDU lies with its foundation. At the heart is a theory that educated couples would produce better children, a belief not shared by all who join this dating service. If one is to believe gossip in this small nation that is full of gossip, this belief has resulted in at least one tragic death. A persistent rumor of the past five years is that the first wife of Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who is the son of Lee Kuan Yew, committed suicide because she gave birth to an albino son. It was, according to rumormongers, a glaring refutation of her father-in-law's eugenic belief.

JOHN CHUA, a Chinese Singaporean and formerly a TV journalist, is now a writer living in the United States.

CUBA POSTCARD

SOFT CELL

By Anna Husarska

The stewardess on the Cubana flight from Toronto to Havana was nice, and we chatted in Spanish. But once on the ground, from the moment the Cuban border guard said, "You speak Spanish, don't you?" I knew I was in trouble. He obviously recognized me from a previous visit—in October, which resulted in my expulsion (see "Espresso To Go," TNR, November 4, 1991). What I also knew—and the Interior Ministry did not—was exactly how long my (and their) trouble was going to last: the next flight to Toronto was six days later. They took away my French passport and declared me unwelcome in spite of the package tour I was on ("Christmas and New Year on the sunny island"). That night, after a brief "hello again" and "long time no see" exchange with the soldiers who remembered me from three months ago, I was shuttled to the hotel for which I had prepaid and was handed over to a plainclothesman with strict instructions not to go out on the street.

The next day they left me alone in the hotel and I had a closer look at my fellow Cuba-travelers. The same crowd that hung around Managua when it was still a Sandinista paradise now flocks here, only in higher concentration, since most of its other havens are lost to advancing capitalism. Most of these bereft Sandalistas are Spanish and German, some American, and a few Dutch. They know the words of all the revolutionary songs better than the local youth (who take instead to Michael Jackson). They eat in hard currency restaurants, travel in air-conditioned Intour buses, do their shopping for English translations of Fidel Castro's oeuvre in dollar stores, and cannot possibly understand what the fuss about economic catastrophe and political prisoners is all about.

The remaining five days of my stay I was schlepped between my hotel bedroom and the Ministry of Interior migration office, which served as a day care center. I was offered meals in the soldiers' canteen, but after the first lunch—cold rice with beans and some pieces of hairy meatlike tinned product—I decided this was a golden opportunity to lose those ten pounds I gained on Russian bread earlier in December. My guardians nervously jumped up every time I went to drink at the faucet, which was relatively seldom. Water was available only early in the morning and then a few hours around 3 p.m. After a couple of days I started bringing a thermos, the object of general envy among my guards. In the last days it all became more relaxed: I was able to wash my TNR polo shirt and dry it in the ministry's back yard.

If water was my main physical sustenance, television fed the soul. I was allowed—indeed strongly encouraged—to watch television in the interrogation room. I expected Christmas eve to bring some special programming, and sure enough, it did: a three-hour speech by Castro to a trade union Congress on both television channels. (It turned out not to be so very special: he gave equally long speeches three days in a row.) I was the only one to follow the whole thing through; my angels were more intrigued by desperate screams that came from across the street. When the noise began to disturb my enjoyment of Fidel's performance, I went out to inquire. "A pig is being slaughtered for Christmas dinner," Eduardo told me. (We were on first-name terms by then.) He said this in a wistful rather than menacing tone.

I returned from the pig screams to Fidel's speech. The Comandante had harsh words for the internal opposition, so I figured my dissident friends, Elizardo Sánchez, Gustavo Arcos, and others, must still be very

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active in their defense of human rights and struggling for democratic reforms. Kind words were reserved for oxen ("so much less polluting then tractors"). Fidel called on scientists to come up with "other innovations" for the "special period in time of peace"—the euphemism Cubans use to describe the forced paralysis of a great part of the economy due to oil shortages. He praised bikes—"daughters of the special period," as he called them lovingly—and argued their superiority to the overcrowded buses made by former Eastern European allies. From there he moved on to the fall of the [illegible]-evil empire, which resulted in a "second blockade," unmerited like the first one imposed by the Yankee imperialist. "It makes us sad that the USSR is no more," he said, and sad he was indeed.

In a way, being an inmate gave me some insight on the psyche of the Ministry of Interior guards. When I talked to them about Cuba's sugar exports, they tried to convince me that saccharine was an imperialist invention to destroy their country's economy, something I never heard even Castro say. But generally in response to all the questions I asked them—on politics, economy, or foreign affairs—they agreed with the opinion of the Comandante. (It sounded like the beginning of that old Russian joke that ends: "But, don't you have any opinions of your own?" "Sure I do, but I disagree with them.") They of course saw no use for a second—God forbid third—party, but then they were unable to see the difference between Party and state. Their main topic of conversation was shortages, rationing systems, and tricks to purchase staples. Apparently they too were buying cigarettes at black market prices of ten pesos a pack, although their monthly salaries oscillate around 300 pesos.

Because of gas shortages, my guards were running all sorts of errands while driving me between the ministry and the hotel. One morning I saw a block-long line for the daily *Granma*: as we were turning the corner next to the man selling the newspaper, I jumped out of the car and shouted, "The Ministry of Interior has detained me, let me buy without standing in line." The soldiers came running after me, but in the meantime the line—in a gesture of solidarity that stunned me—let me buy it, and then my driver, stunning me even further, gave me the twenty centavos it cost.

Throughout my detention, the soldiers and officials of the Ministry of Interior were rather nice and played it fair, especially once representatives from the French Embassy visited me. They did break into my luggage left in the hotel, though all they found were clothes. Maybe friendly isn't exactly the word, but we kind of got familiar. They brought me delicious espressos, we played games (I taught one of the nicest guards, Guillermo, the battleships game and he won), they asked me about Eastern Europe. A few spoke Russian, some—Angola vets—Portuguese. They were intrigued by the book I was reading in preparation for a seminar at the University of Maryland: Hedrick Smith's *The Power Game.* We discussed the politicians portrayed on the cover: they expressed admiration for Kissinger, and said Carter was OK, although too nosy. ("Why meddle in other countries' treatment of their counterrevolutionaries?") But when I mentioned Angola, the conversation came to an end.

After the French press agency correspondent Bertrand Rosenthal came to visit me, they got more uptight, put me on a Montreal instead of Toronto plane, and also dumped me at the airport eight hours before the plane's departure. But I had my little moment of revenge when the plane made a stopover in Varadero, the beach resort, and all passengers were asked to go to the airport building. There, donning the most practiced fellow-travelerish look, my precious copy of *Granma* stuck under my arm, I asked the *compañero* from the Cubana airline if he could correct this unfortunate mistake and reroute me back to Toronto. *No hay problema.* Back on the plane, the stewardess was very nice, and we chatted for a while in Spanish. "Did you have a nice time in Cuba?" she asked after pouring me a glass of rum. I took a sip and mumbled, "Uh-huh."

ANNA HUSARSKA, a Polish journalist, is a frequent contributor to TNR.

Bush and the CEOs.

SHORT-TERMERS

By Sidney Blumenthal

Immediately after Senator Harris Wofford trounced George Bush's surrogate, former Attorney General Dick Thornburgh, in the Pennsylvania by-election, the startled president made a series of short-term decisions. First, he canceled his long-planned trip to Japan. "It's time to take care of our own," had run Wofford's slogan. So it was no time for the foreign jaunt. When Bush finally rescheduled the Japanese visit, it was recast as a campaign event. The Japanese, vaguely fearful of the unslated Democratic nominee, would be programmed to show their support for the president by granting him a variety of symbolic concessions. Bush would be doing more than displaying his prowess in foreign affairs. He would be demonstrating his heartfelt domestic concern: "Jobs and jobs and jobs," said Bush about his mission.

Bush had filled Air Force One with twenty-one corporate executives who had been brought along to illustrate that he meant business. But the president, by his choice of companions, unwittingly highlighted the similarities between himself and these bloated CEOs. Just before liftoff, Robert Stempel of General Motors, a prominent member of Bush's entourage, had

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announced the layoff of 74,000 production workers, the closing of twenty-one plants—and an $80 million compensation package for the upper echelon of management. Even before the cholesterol-laden plane landed in Japan, the vast overcompensation of the CEOs aboard had become a volatile issue. Stempel, for example, was being rewarded for his failing management with an annual salary of $2.1 million. "In Japan," remarked Peter Drucker, the management expert, "somebody like Mr. Stempel would have announced his resignation by now." Bush's tour, intended to project strength—his political mastery in the service of U.S. economic power—instead projected pathos. The captains of industry accompanying him starkly appeared in the spotlight as architects of economic decline. Their whiny, even beggarly tone was hardly the supremely confident sound of the American Century. They were coming to Japan to abase themselves, and Bush was their leader.

But the similarity between Bush and the CEOs goes further than mere appearance. In 1980, on the eve of the Republican era, a prophetic article appeared in the *Harvard Business Review* titled "Managing our way to economic decline," written by two Harvard Business School professors, Robert H. Hayes and William J. Abernathy. They argued that it was not only, or even primarily, macroeconomic factors that were leading to a crisis of American business. Rather the cause was traced to "the attitudes, preoccupations, and practices of American managers. By their preference for servicing existing markets rather than creating new ones and by their devotion to short-term returns and 'management by the numbers,' many of them have effectively forsworn long-term technological superiority as a competitive weapon. In consequence, they have abdicated their strategic responsibilities."

Hayes and Abernathy described a whole generation of managers driven by the need to maximize short-term returns, basing their decisions on myopic marketing surveys, and fearful of risk and innovation: "In truth, they have learned caution so well that many are in danger of forgetting that market-driven, follow-the-leader companies usually end up following the rest of the pack as well."

It is all utterly familiar. On this expedition, the president is the first manager among equals. Like the head of GM, Bush's short-term leadership, rooted in the data of his market researchers, has profited at the expense of the future of the entire enterprise. But Bush's methods have had an effect on more than the American economy. His own presidency now is in decline. The biggest threat to it is not the Japanese, or even the Democrats. It is ultimately his own brand of leadership. Bush, like the others aboard Air Force One, is a CEO under fire.

Bush's trip is a case study illuminating the cogency of Hayes and Abernathy's analysis. Faced with crisis, he was thrown back on his management skills. Instantly, he transformed his diplomacy into a campaign exercise. But this was not strategic planning; it was a short-term tactic. He was not investing in new product development (i.e., innovative policy) but reactively responding to his consumer marketing. His rhetoric—"Jobs and jobs and jobs"—was a hasty effort to satisfy the demand that his pollsters had detected to address the recession. Bush's upcoming State of the Union address is another opportunity to present a plethora of short-term market-driven panaceas.

The campaign itself is a task subject to his management style. As in 1988, he does not see it as a forum in which to educate the public. That notion is completely contrary to the instincts of the short-term manager. Rather, Bush envisions the campaign as a personally abhorrent exercise that must be gotten through by falling back on "the gospel of pseudo-professionalism," as Hayes and Abernathy call the "corporate religion." In business, they mean the managerial hierarchy captivated by expertise that clothes itself in "easily quantifiable terms." In politics, the same process is assumed by the political technicians to whom Bush has assigned the job of his campaign. "It's politics," he said in Australia, "it's politics from tomorrow on. And it isn't very pleasant ... dog-eat-dog."

Certainly, as his Japan trip demonstrated, his short-term focus cannot address the larger crisis of decline. But attempting to dominate politics through his defensive management style may not even arrest his own decline. His sudden physical collapse horrifyingly made the question of decline center on his mortality and the succession. "The key to long-term success—even survival—in business," wrote Hayes and Abernathy, "is what it has always been: to invest, to innovate, to lead, to create value where none existed before." But that, unfortunately, requires being more than a portfolio manager. •

How to get tough with Japan.

GREEN CARD

By John Fund

It's no wonder President Bush took ill during his just-completed trip to Japan. He was under enormous pressure to talk tough on trade. Looking over his shoulder were twenty-one American corporate executives—including the heads of the Big Three automakers. The CEOs insisted that all they want is what Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca calls a "fair shake" at selling U.S. products to Japan. Everyone knows, however, what they are really looking for: a sweetheart deal protecting them from lower-cost, higher-quality competition in the United States.

Of course, erecting still more barriers to retaliate for the Japanese not allowing imports of U.S. rice or auto

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parts will hurt only U.S. consumers and Japanese workers. According to the Institute for International Economics, Washington's trade barriers already cost U.S. consumers $80 billion a year, or more than $1,200 a family. Moreover, as James Bovard documents in his new book, *The Fair TradeFraud,* such pressure seldom has the desired effect. There is a further danger: new restrictions might well ignite the biggest trade war since Messrs. Smoot and Hawley helped drag the world into depression.

Instead of resorting to old-fashioned trade brinkmanship, America should creatively use its dynamic culture and economy to get the Japanese to play fair. One strategy could be selectively opening (instead of closing) our markets and borders as leverage for better trade treatment. These tactics not only would have a good chance of working and hurting a lot fewer people than the "economic warfare" of trade restrictions. They also would avoid rewarding American companies who may call for protection in the name of "fair trade" but whose real goal is a less open market that allows unimaginative management to keep their jobs and perks while raising prices for American consumers.

For example, what if the United States played its green card—literally? By loosening our tough laws on legal immigration we could punish the Japanese through kindness by allowing more of their talented citizens into the United States. More than 1.5 million foreigners legally immigrated to America in 1990. Any one country is allowed a maximum of 20,000 slots, beyond family reunion and hardship exceptions. Otherwise, unless they invest large sums of money under a special new visa program, economic immigrants are denied permanent-resident visas or green cards if there are Americans who can do the job the newcomer is seeking.

Despite its problems, America is a highly desirable place to live and work. All over the world there are talented people who would jump at the chance to move here. A special one-time lottery last October for 40,000 green cards drew 12 million applications. Japan had the third-highest number of applications after Ireland and Poland. More than 16 percent of the green cards that were eventually issued were won by Japanese applicants. We could take advantage of our nation's special appeal by varying the number of immigrants we allow in from specific countries based on our trade relations with them. The more a country refuses to open up a specific market, the more the United States could encourage it to do so through the lure of green cards for professionals in that or related fields.

One of the Japanese markets most closed to U.S. firms is financial services. Joseph Grundfest, former commissioner of the Securities and Exchange Commission, says that Japan's financial service companies are so heavily protected that they are akin to the pampered U.S. car companies of the 1960s. The security firms all hire from the same pool of educated, multilingual, and mobile young people, who are fortuitously in short supply now in Japan. If negotiations to open Japanese financial markets fails, the United States could quietly announce that in coming months it will pass out green cards to several hundred Japanese stockbrokers or financial analysts. While their standard of living would probably stay about the same, they would be able to enjoy the benefits of our more open society. Our market could certainly absorb that number without changing pay scales much, but the proud Japanese would lose tremendous face if several hundred of their best and brightest left the country. As an added benefit, the United States would be bringing talented, resourceful, and hard-working new "Americans" to live among us. Immigration policy could also be used to pry open trade in other areas, such as computers and medical technology.

Another approach would be specifically to encourage professional women to immigrate to the United States. Many Japanese women are frustrated at their unemancipated status in the business world. "Despite all the problems, women have greater opportunities in this country than anywhere else that I've known," Mechiko Kosaka, who immigrated to America to teach computer science, told *The New York Times* last year. A Japanese businessman told me privately that handing out green cards to female professionals would be devastating in a male-chauvinist society such as Japan. "Women are important in business now, and they return from trips to America filled with envy for the opportunities they see there," he told me. "Your idea would clean us out of thousands of young women overnight."

This supply-side approach to trade policy could apply to goods as well as people. The Japanese fear losing market share in the United States above almost anything. Let's say significant barriers to the sale of U.S. auto parts remain despite last month's commitment to allow more of them into Japan. Rather than raise tariffs on Japanese goods, the United States could announce it is reducing or eliminating tariffs on all auto parts imported from Japan's most feared competitors, South Korea and Taiwan. South Korean auto companies produce many high-quality components patterned directly after Japanese models. Lower tariffs would allow them to sell more products at lower cost in the United States—at the expense of Japan's market share.

Could this strategy really work? Last year, when I was in Japan for an economic conference, I half-humorously suggested that the United States should use such trade tactics. After my presentation, a greatly agitated Japanese government official approached me. "These variable tariffs aren't a serious suggestion from anyone in Congress?" he asked. I told him no, and he was clearly relieved. "Good," he said. "Pressure using South Korea or Taiwan is something we don't know how to deal with." My guess is that the Japanese might publicly scream extortion but privately would become more accommodating at the negotiating table.

JOHN FUND is an editorial writer for *The Wall Street Journal.*

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THE PRESS

THE NEW CENSORS

By Juliette Kayyem

SOWETO

Early Wednesday morning, October 23, gunmen entered a train station in Nancefield, Soweto, and began shooting on the platform and into a commuter train. By 6:15 that morning, as the train traveled on to four other stations en route to Johannesburg, nine passengers lay dead. The massacre was a hot story for *The Sowetan*, the newspaper that covers the township. The paper routinely reported the incident, and cited the far from unwarranted conclusion of the police investigation that members of the Inkatha Freedom Party had something to do with it. But this was South Africa, and the IFP—a real power in the township—publicly attacked *The Sowetan* for the story.

The incident serves as an emblem of the difficulties black journalists face in the new South Africa. Banned, harassed, and arrested in the days of apartheid, black journalists seem at first, in color and profession, double beneficiaries of political reform. Yet the path toward constitutional representation and political power has been a vexing process. For reporters and photographers on *The Sowetan*, the country's largest daily, the new South Africa has its own occupational hazards—and the pressures against free speech and reporting now come from within the black community, rather than from outside it.

Back in the 1980s the greatest danger to black journalists came from the white minority. As described in William Finnegan's *Dateline Soweto*, black reporters were by definition political activists. Daring to report or photograph apartheid violence or township life defied censorship laws and brought down government harassment. Even in the old days, however, black journalists faced threats from the community they covered—a kind of censorship Finnegan barely mentioned in his book. Now as black political parties compete, and as violence spreads throughout the townships, black reporters work with ever more common threats of verbal and physical intimidation by township residents, hostel dwellers, and activists.

Reporters are threatened with being necklaced as they try to cover a story; a photographer is manhandled when he tells a crowd which newspaper he works for; an editor, accused of fostering division, must move his wife and children to a neighbor's house when he receives a bomb threat. The result of these pressures on journalists is simple: in a recent forum on the new censorship sponsored by the South African Institute of Race Relations, some black reporters suggested that only 60 percent of the information black newspapers report is factual. Journalists are, for example, often compelled by party activists to inflate numbers of those present at political rallies. Or, in many cases, reporters will simply not cover sensitive issues—for example, whether boycotting school has harmed the black community. And no black newspaper discusses the culture of political intolerance that makes it difficult to cover any issue objectively.

Several years ago *The Sowetan* was embroiled in a political fight that ended in a mass boycott of the paper. *The Sowetan* had chosen to cover the meetings of smaller political organizations, such as the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). "Several prominent activists," as senior assistant editor Thami Mazwai calls them, claimed that the paper was wasting space on parties that were insignificant. More interesting than the boycott itself is Mazwai's description. The villains of censorship always are "prominent activists," or "certain organizations." To name them might incite more trouble.

To make matters worse, there's no culture among readers and potential readers that might demand or support an independent paper. A recent survey conducted by the Department of Political Science at the University of Stellenbosch asked 270 black South Africans about their acceptance of differing political ideas. When asked whether to allow "newspapers to write about the policies of ... [the respondent's least-liked group, e.g., the National Party, the African National Congress, etc.]," 40 percent answered "definitely not."

The Sowetan is non-aligned. It has to be. Its editorial page hasn't endorsed the ANC, Inkatha, AZAPO, or the PAC. To do so would be suicide. Sello Rabothatha, *The Sowetan*'s news editor, knows that many of his senior journalists and editors have different political ideologies. If the paper were to endorse any political party, says Rabothatha, "there would be a number of resignations here." But such prissiness inevitably undercuts the edge of the newspaper's contribution to public debate.

The news content is also often bland. In an attempt to calm a volatile community, and, according to Rabothatha, "to make Soweto seem more normal than not," *The Sowetan* often behaves like a small-town paper. Front-page coverage of township violence is shared with a *Sowetan* wedding photo essay titled "Looking at the Brighter Side of Life" and an entry clue for the paper's "Stick a Pic" competition for a leather lounge.

This small-town feel, despite 1.6 million readers, is very much a consequence of the fact that the black journalists and editors live in Soweto. When there is violence, the second concern is the story. The first concern, says Robert Magwaza, photography editor, is "that your mother and wife were not on that train." He is toying with the idea of moving out of Soweto altogether. The law at last permits it; and he can now afford it. He

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fears for his wife and children's safety. But he also worries that he will betray the paper, and his friends, if he leaves. And yet the personal proximity of the newspaper's reporters to the unrest in the township means that, when readers are displeased, a reporter is an easy target. Themba Molege, a political reporter, has to be escorted to Zulu-dominated hostels by IFP members for fear of his safety. Rabothatha acknowledges that "they not only threaten you, but they know what car we drive, where we live, our wives' names, how many children we have."

Black photographers are particularly at risk. Mbuzeni Zulu, who, when the paper needs a lead story, is sent out into the township just to "look for action" (he's rarely disappointed), has often been turned away when he has tried to cover political rallies. His face, and camera, are now known to work for *The Sowetan*.

Admittedly, reporters from *The Sowetan* can easily mesh into the crowd, being less conspicuous in the township than their white counterparts. But one of the enduring ironies of apartheid is that blacks are often in a weaker position as reporters than whites. Blacks, according to Len Maseko, deputy news editor, still find it hard to say no to white reporters, although they'll ignore fellow blacks. When *Sowetan* staffers tried to question a Zulu man who'd been shot by police during an Inkatha rally, the man refused to answer any questions. Black reporters went outside the hospital room and grabbed a white colleague. The white reporter wasn't interested in the injured man's story, but he was able to solicit the answers for *The Sowetan*.

Integrating *The Sowetan*'s reporting staff might be one way to steel the newspaper's nerve, but it can bring more troubles in its wake. Already, *The Sowetan*'s black journalists are wary of their white management, Argus, South Africa's newspaper conglomerate. Lately Argus has started to pay more attention to the paper, which it used to leave more or less alone. Its recent hire—an Afrikaner managing editor, Deon du Plessis—has stirred resentment. Each morning, it's du Plessis's job to send a critique of the morning paper to all editors and writers. He comments on everything from bad layout to bad English. He talks of the "emergence of market factor on black journalism": it is his hope to turn the paper into something more than a township rag. Predictably perhaps, many black journalists, who spoke on condition of anonymity, have taken umbrage. Says one reporter, "It gives a bad impression, this large white guy, looking like he runs the place." Since du Plessis took over, the editorial page of *The Sowetan* has become, as one reporter says, "more white, less liberation struggle." Du Plessis and his nominal superior, editor Aggrey Klaaste, who's black, co-author the editorial page, but, as another reporter comments, "Deon definitely has the final say on it." The implication is that Argus acknowledges the political significance of *The Sowetan* and now wants to have greater dominion over the paper.

Between its white owners and its black audience, *The Sowetan* is now fighting for its integrity. Freedom of expression has a paltry history in South Africa. In the old days, the National Party never shied from censoring the press. In the new South Africa, black journalists face conflicts with their readers, their paymasters, the political groups they cover—and work in a climate of violence few American journalists could even contemplate. That press freedom has survived at all is perhaps a wonder. That it will flourish in the new South Africa is looking more doubtful by the day.

JULIETTE KAYYEM is a free-lance writer in Johannesburg.

Orrin Hatch's blind eye.

BCCI NO EVIL

By Mark Hosenball

In any contest for the most self-righteous member of Congress, Senator Orrin Hatch would have to come near the top of the chart. With his air of boy-scout innocence and church-deacon prissiness, the Utah Republican has been a moral pointman for a succession of administrations: defending the perpetrators of Iranamok and leading the Republican assault against Anita Hill. But in the future, Hatch might want to tone down the moralism. Facts now coming to light are focusing attention on his own less than squeaky-clean private affairs.

Hatch's sanctimony first caught up with him last summer when he couldn't resist adding his two cents' worth to the controversy over the now infamous Bank of Credit and Commerce International. Hatch initiated a Senate report exposing the Democratic Party connections with a shady thrift called Centrust. A coup for Hatch, one might think, except that some Hatch aides were reportedly nervous that Democrats might be angered into retaliating. The staffers realized that their boss too had something to hide, or at any rate something he'd rather the public not remember. In one of those boring Senate floor speeches that legislators use to appease constituents or reward friends, Hatch, on February 22, 1990, rose to commend then Attorney General Richard Thornburgh and his department for their settlement of a money-laundering case involving the then obscure BCCI. Some would later charge that the settlement Hatch praised was an important element in efforts to keep a lid on the BCCI scandal's political dimensions. For a start, documents recently turned up showing that Hatch gave the speech after meeting with BCCI lawyers—including Robert Altman, who with his

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spouse, actress Lynda Carter, was a social acquaintance of the senator's. In a January 9, 1990, letter Altman assured Hatch that BCCI had "undertaken a global effort" to clean up its act. Altman also gave Hatch a four-page briefing paper explaining why it would be unfair to conclude that the U.S. government's initial money-laundering charges against BCCI—produced after a lengthy "sting" operation—suggested systematic corruption. Hatch used Altman's material extensively in his Senate floor speech, praising the bank's "senior management, directors, and shareholders ... for the responsible way the company has responded to the charges." These are the same directors, management, and shareholders who were subsequently accused of using the bank to perpetrate a multibillion-dollar fraud.

Ironically, it was one of Hatch's GOP cohorts who unwittingly turned over the stone that brought to light Hatch's strange history with BCCI. Representative Bill McCollum, a House Banking Committee Republican from Florida, became curious about a mysterious BCCI henchman from Lebanon named Mohammed Hammoud. Hammoud had purchased Clifford and Altman's shareholdings in First American Bank at a wildly inflated price, handing the two Washington lawyers a windfall profit. Hammoud also interested McCollum because as head of a House Republican task force on terrorism, McCollum maintained his own stable of intelligence experts, one of whom suggested that Hammoud was an important money-mover for Hezbollah, the nefarious Iranian-supported terrorist group that was holding Americans hostage in Lebanon. It would greatly compound Clifford and Altman's predicament if the man who made them millionaires turned out to be Hezbollah's Daddy Warbucks.

McCollum was bold enough to ask Clifford and Altman directly about possible connections between Hammoud and Hezbollah when they appeared at the Banking Committee's hearing. They appeared to have no idea what he was talking about. The question was sufficiently pointed, however, to attract the attention of a few journalists. On close examination, the evidence linking Hammoud to Hezbollah was thin; in reality, he was close to a Lebanese Shiite sheikh who was one of the hostage-takers' most vehement opponents. But it also emerged that Hammoud's dealings with BCCI were monstrously tangled and that he was suspected of having served as a BCCI frontman in various questionable enterprises. And some of Hammoud's American acquaintances noted his habit of bragging about his influence in Washington—and about his friendship with Senator Orrin Hatch.

Upon further investigation, it turned out that Hammoud was only one of three Middle Easterners—all with tangled financial histories and BCCI links—whom Hatch had welcomed into his Senate office in the years before he defended BCCI's honor on the Senate floor. By most accounts, Hatch's dealings with Hammoud were relatively casual. He had been introduced to Hammoud in the early 1980s by Earl Milne, a Utah businessman who was trying to interest the Lebanese financier in a real estate deal. Milne, according to his own account, thought Hatch might be able to impress Hammoud about prospects for property investments in Utah. After two meetings with Hatch and his advisers, Hammoud failed to go through with any of the Utah deals he had been offered. But he did aggressively lobby Hatch to arrange a White House visit for his Shiite spiritual leader from Beirut. Eventually, the State Department did arrange an American tour for the Shiite sheikh. Hatch denies Hammoud ever talked to him about BCCI. Hammoud died in Geneva last year under mysterious circumstances.

The second Middle Eastern businessman Hatch hosted on Capitol Hill was more conspicuous. Adnan Khashoggi allegedly earned a fortune brokering arms deals (and payoffs) between U.S. defense contractors and Saudi sheikhs. For reasons still obscure, Khashoggi decided to invest in a massive office and leisure complex in Salt Lake City; the deal included a financial rescue package for the struggling Utah Jazz NBA franchise. One of Khashoggi's top American lieutenants, Emmanuel Floor, says he arranged for Khashoggi to be introduced to Hatch as a leading investor in Hatch's state. There's no evidence that Hatch's contacts with Khashoggi were ever anything more than social. But Khashoggi's involvement in Iran-U.S. arms deals, some financed through BCCI, later became key elements of the Iranamok scandal (and the subsequent bankruptcy of Khashoggi's Salt Lake City project became one of the Utah capital's largest financial embarrassments).

Most intriguing is Hatch's friendship with a third businessman, a Lebanese-American architect and developer from Houston named Monzer Hourani. Both Hatch and Hourani say they met each other through the Mormon Church and have been friends for several years. That friendship blossomed into a bizarre business relationship in which Hatch has granted major favors to Hourani. Like many Houston real estate operators, Hourani's architectural practice and development schemes fell on hard times when the oil boom collapsed in the mid-'80s. Like many Texas wheeler-dealers, Hourani also found himself in debt to several shaky S&Ls. And like other Texas businessmen with S&L problems, Hourani called on a friendly member of Congress to bail him out. However, the politician Hourani appealed to for help was not from Texas but from Utah.

Invoking the concern of unnamed "constituents," Hatch in July 1986 wrote to S&L regulators on Hourani's behalf, suggesting that Hourani had been the victim of "inappropriate actions" by a failed Houston thrift called Mainland Savings. Hatch warned that Hourani might be able to bring "substantial legal process" against Mainland's receivers (namely the government) and urged a top regulator to order his "Washington staff" to look into the matter urgently so it did not become "more difficult." In response, the general counsel for the Federal Home Loan Bank Board pointed out that regulators

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believed it was the receivers who "[have] claims against Mr. Hourani." But he did report that government lawyers were trying to work out an amicable settlement.

Hourani and a lawyer for the receivers claimed Hatch's letter had no impact on the regulators, though both acknowledged that the S&L's claims against Hourani were eventually settled without embarrassing and costly litigation. *The Houston Post*, by contrast, reported that Hatch had "performed miracles for Hourani." (The newspaper also reported that in 1987, Texas state banking regulators had sent a "criminal referral" to the FBI and federal prosecutors about Hourani's dealings with a second Texas thrift; there is no indication a federal inquiry was ever opened.) For his part, Hatch denied having ever seen his own letter to thrift regulators on Hourani's behalf, but didn't dispute its authenticity. Strangely, another large borrower whose dealings may have contributed to the collapse of Mainland Savings and Loan turned out to be Khashoggi. After first denying any connection between Khashoggi and Hourani, Floor later recalled that Mainland officials might have once introduced him to the Houston architect. But Floor says Khashoggi never did business with Hourani.

ORRIN HATCH BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Hourani also denied dealing with Khashoggi. But he acknowledges having been in regular contact with Mohammed Hammoud, the alleged BCCI frontman. According to Hourani, he and Hammoud over several years worked with their mutual friend, Senator Hatch, on various private schemes to free U.S. hostages held by terrorists in Lebanon. According to Hourani, Hammoud, though a Shiite moderate, had high-level friends in the Syrian government, including President Hafez Assad. Hourani himself, meanwhile, had friends among Lebanon's Christian factions; between the two of them, Hammoud and Hourani could work both sides of Beirut's Green Line. Hourani's explanation of how Hatch fit into this diplomatic team was somewhat vague. But he said that at one point, he and Hammoud had planned to take Hatch to Lebanon with them on a hostage-liberation mission; the trip was aborted after Hammoud's untimely death. According to letters that Hourani sent to Hatch, however, Hatch also arranged for Hourani to discuss Lebanese politics with top State Department officials. Last January, just as Desert Storm was being launched, Hatch even arranged for Hourani to send his own Middle East peace plan to Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger. The centerpiece of Hourani's plan was for the Kuwaitis, the Saudis, and the United Arab Emirates each to donate 5 percent of their oil revenues to resettle the Palestinians. Eagleburger's reaction to this proposal is unknown.

Hatch's unofficial diplomacy with Hourani and Hammoud ultimately evolved into a weird business partnership with Hourani that led both Hatch and Hourani back to BCCI. According to financial disclosure statements Hatch routinely filed with the Secretary of the Senate, in 1988 Hatch gave Hourani just under $10,000 to buy a one-bedroom condominium in a small development in a rundown part of southwest Houston. Though the development is protected by a high fence and an electronic security system, the condo association's lawyer acknowledges the neighborhood is dangerous and that the development's pool had to be shut down because too many fights had broken out. Hourani describes the investment as a "blind trust," though Hatch seems to know what is in it; Hourani says that at most the condo's value may have appreciated by 50 percent since Hatch bought it, earning him an unrealized capital gain of up to $5,000, though he also takes in around $800 yearly in net rental income. Why Hatch would want to make such a strange investment is unclear: Hourani says Hatch didn't have much money to invest and wanted to buy something cheap; Hatch, whose financial statements show he has considerable property holdings in Utah, said in a statement that the Senate ethics committee "never raised concerns" about the condo investment. A recent title

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search suggests that Hatch may find the investment difficult to cash in on. The condo is encumbered by a $1.8 million federal court judgment against Hourani, the only owner listed in Houston property records. The judgment was issued in connection with a lawsuit against Hourani by bank regulators acting as receivers for a failed Houston savings and loan.

Despite such disappointments, Hatch again used his influence to help Hourani shore up his businesses. Shortly after giving his February 1990 speech praising the management of BCCI, Hatch called Swaleh Naqvi, BCCI's chief executive officer in London (now under house arrest in the United Arab Emirates), on Hourani's behalf. According to Hourani, Hatch volunteered that he knew some people at BCCI and would recommend Hourani to them. According to Hatch, who initially denied dealing with BCCI but had to change his story after Hourani gave a TV interview, he rang BCCI because Hourani was from Lebanon and "I thought perhaps an Arab bank would consider helping him." A few weeks after Hatch's phone call, Hourani—who also initially had denied any business dealings with BCCI, then changed his story—sent a letter to Naqvi proposing a complicated scheme: BCCI would give him letters of credit that he could use as collateral to obtain loans from other (presumably American) banks, and in return would give BCCI a shareholding in development projects. In his letter Hourani said he was looking forward to a London meeting with BCCI. In the end, BCCI declined to back Hourani's deals, according to Hatch and Hourani.

Ultimately, Hatch's convoluted dealings with BCCI and his trio of Middle Eastern hustlers may amount to no more than a series of bad judgments, showing that Hatch is capable of being taken in both financially and politically. But by initially falsely denying his efforts to help his friend get BCCI financing, Hatch at least made it look like he had something to hide. It's the sort of situation moral exemplars do best to avoid.

MARK HOSENBALL is a producer at NBC News.

A consumer revolts.

THE TYRANNY OF CHOICE

By Steven Waldman

Why did I nearly start crying the last time I went to buy socks? I'd stopped in a store called Sox Appeal, the perfect place, one might imagine, to spend a pleasant few minutes acquiring a pair of white athletic socks. After a brief visit to the men's dress sock department—dallying with more than 300 varieties, among them products embroidered with bikini-clad women, neckties, flowers, Rocky and Bullwinkl, and elegant logos such as "The Gold Bullion Collection: Imported" and "D'zin Pour Homme"—I finally made it into the athletics section. Here, the product-option high was even headier. Past the "Hypercolor" socks that change hue, combination "sport-and-dress" white socks, and "EarthCare" environmentally safe socks (which, unfortunately, boast of decomposing easily) were hosiery for every sport: racquetball, running, walking, cycling, hiking, basketball, and aerobics. I needed help.

"What if I play racquetball occasionally and run occasionally and walk sometimes, but don't want to get a different sock for each one?" I asked the saleswoman. She wrinkled her nose: "It's really a matter of personal preference." Did she have any standard-issue white tube socks? The nose-wrinkle again. "Well, yeah, you *could* get those, but ..." I started reading the backs of the boxes, elaborately illustrated with architects' renderings of the stress points in the "Cushion-Engineered (TM) Zone Defense." After briefly contemplating the implications of the Cross-Training Sock—"Shock-Woven elastic arch brace contours to arch, providing additional support and normal articulation of the bones in the foot, while keeping sock migration minimal"—I spent another five minutes studying shapes (anklet, crew, or quarter) and manufacturers, and grabbed a Cross Trainer, two walkers, and, in an environmental guilt-spasm, one pair of the EarthCare.

Since that day, the sock metaphor has crept constantly into my mind—and not just when I'm buying consumer products. At work I pick through dozens of options on my cafeteria insurance benefits plan. At the doctor's I'm offered several possible treatments for a neck problem and no real way to decide. At the video rental store I end up renting four movies even though I'll watch only one. Choices proliferate everywhere. My mental "tilt" light flashes continuously. I keep thinking that the more

STEVEN WALDMAN is a Washington correspondent for *Newsweek*.

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choices there are, the more wrong choices there are—and the higher the odds I'll make a mistake.

The topic of how much freedom freedom brings has fascinated philosophers throughout the ages. But when Sartre urged man to embrace and acknowledge his own power to choose, he did not have in mind figuring out the difference between hair conditioner, rejuvenator, reconstructor, and clarifier. So far, public debate on choice has been limited to just two realms: abortion and, more recently, public schools. But we're in the midst of a choice explosion that is much further reaching.

Think it over. A typical supermarket in 1976 had 9,000 products; today it has more than 30,000. The average produce section in 1975 carried sixty-five items; this summer it carried 285. (Kiwi has hit the top 20 list.) A Cosmetic Center outside Washington carries about 1,500 types and sizes of hair care products. The median household got six TV stations in 1975. Thanks to deregulation of the cable TV industry, that family now has more than thirty channels. The number of FM radio stations has doubled since 1970. A new religious denomination forms every week. (The 1980s brought us major additions such as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and smaller groups such as the Semjase Silver Star Center, which follows the Twelve Bids from Patule that were given by extraterrestrial Space Brothers to Edmund "Billy" Meier.) In 1955 only 4 percent of the adult population had left the faith of their childhood. By 1985 one-third had. In 1980, 564 mutual funds existed. This year there are 3,347.

There has been a sharp rise in the number of people choosing new faces. More than twice as many cosmetic surgery operations were performed in the 1980s than in the 1970s, estimates the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery. In the past decade a new periodical was born every day. Some have perished, but the survivors include: *Elvis International Forum*, *Smart Kids* (recent cover headline: "Should Babies Learn to Read?"), *American Handgunner*, *Triathlete*, *Harley Women*, *Log Home Living*, *Musclecar Classics*, and (my favorite) *Contemporary Urology*.

The growth of variety predates this recession, will continue after it, and, to a large extent, has persisted during it. *New Product News* reports that despite the depressed economy 21 percent more new products were introduced in supermarkets and drug stores in '91 than the year before. Obvious benefits abound, of course, and not just for people with money. Telephone deregulation has made it cheaper to stay in touch with faraway friends; periodical proliferation meant I had *Fantasy Baseball* magazine to help me prepare for Rotisserie draft day; increased social tolerance has allowed more people (including me) to marry outside their faith or ethnic group; low sodium orange juice means people with high blood pressure can drink it (and it has increased juice sales); more cosmetics mean black women have shades that match their complexions. And so on. And in the words of Morris Cohen, a professor at the Wharton Business School: "If you're overwhelmed by the sock store, don't go there anymore." The beauty of the free market, he explains, is that each individual can select which options to exploit and which to ignore.

But Cohen's rational approach fails to account for how the mind actually processes all this variety. In fact, choice can be profoundly debilitating. It forces us to squander our time, weakens our connections to people and places, and can even poison our sense of contentedness. What follows is a simple checklist—take your pick—of the drawbacks of our new way of choosing.

Choice Erodes Commitment. The same psychological dynamic that has led to a decline in brand loyalty can operate on more important decisions. The more options we have, the more tenuous our commitment becomes to each one. The compulsion to take inventory of one's wants and continually upgrade to a better deal can help explain everything from the rise of the pathological channel switcher who can never watch one TV show straight through to staggering divorce rates and employer-employee disloyalty. Baseball players have never had as many career options as they do now. As a result, sportswriter Thomas Boswell notes, the slightest sign of trouble leads the player or team to try someplace or someone better, producing many "insincere love affairs and very few committed marriages." Sound familiar? Yes, even the infamous male commitment problem results in part from the same thinking. I recently married a wonderful woman, but only after several years of embarrassingly tortured contemplation of what kind of "options" I might be foreclosing. There are, after all, 9,538,000 unmarried females aged 24-39, each with the potential to be more "perfect" than the one before.

Choice Takes Too Much Time. Taken individually, most choices are manageable and, for some sector of the population, a pleasure. Stereo buffs love being able to select the finest woofers. But spend the optimal amount of time on each decision and pretty soon you run out of life. It's not surprising, then, that people feel more rushed than they used to. John P. Robinson, a professor of sociology at the University of Maryland who studied time diaries in 1965, 1975, and 1985, believes we feel harried partly because so much of our free time is absorbed by the process of deciding what to do with it. For all consumers, some time is simply wasted, not in figuring out which options suit them best but rather which distinctions matter. Before you can compare breakfast cereals' bran content you have to figure out if bran is really healthful. Should one care if a hair dryer has higher wattage? Are disposable diapers really worse for the environment than cloth? Being an educated consumer is a full-time job. You need to subscribe to several consumer magazines to do it properly. But which magazine to choose?

Choice Awakens Us to Our Failings. Choice-making lays claim to an expanding portion of our mental energy because the perceived consequences of making the wrong selection keep growing. Under cafeteria insurance plans, if you choose to forgo the dismemberment benefits in favor of extra teeth cleanings, you have no

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one to blame after an accident but yourself. Each time I checked off a box on my benefit election form I flashed forward to some weepy scene when I had to explain to my wife why I had decided to consign us to poverty and despair. When the company dictated my dental plan I could at least curse the Bosses for their gross disregard of dental self-esteem and go about adapting to the situation. Arbitrariness had its comforts.

Similarly, before the mid-1970s, people had little choice about how to invest their money. If inflation eroded their savings accounts, they were at least suffering, along with others, from the cruelty of an irresistible outside force. Today the availability of hundreds of possible investment "products" means everyone is fully capable of doing much worse than her neighbor. The wealthy try to solve that problem by spending still more money to hire financial advisers, only to confront a new set of worries about whether they have selected the best one. For the financially strapped, the anxiety can grow even more intense: the fewer dollars you have the more consequential each mistake becomes. Even when the stakes are small, we live in constant fear of being a Bad Consumer, which in a consumer-oriented society translates roughly into "sucker."

Choice Leads to Inept Consumption. The more choice available, the more information a consumer must have to make a sensible selection. When overload occurs, many simply abandon the posture of rational Super-Consumer. Warning labels on products have become so common that many shoppers simply ignore them all, including the important ones. Several friends have confessed that the selection of car models—591 and rising—has become so dizzying that they tossed aside *Consumer Reports* and relied entirely on the recommendation of a friend. Some become so paralyzed by the quest for the better deal that they postpone decisions indefinitely, while others become so preoccupied with absorbing the new features touted by a manufacturer that they forget to consider the basics. After all the fretting over the migration patterns of the socks, I took them home and found them to be quite fluffy and supportive, but the wrong size.

Consumers may be better informed than they were two decades ago, but salespeople have more tools with which to fight back. I spent three days studying up for a trip to Circuit City to buy a CD player. Despite having read several magazine and newspaper articles, I was, within minutes, putty in the salesman's hands. When I asked for a particular model, he rolled his eyes and laughed, "You must have gotten that from *Consumer Reports.*" With a simple well-timed chuckle he made me doubt my entire research regimen. He then battered me with a flurry of techno-terms and finally moved in for the kill by giving me an audio comparison test between two different systems that sounded exactly alike. My resistance was exhausted, so I bought the system he suggested, which, of course, cost more than I had intended to spend.

Choice Causes Political Alienation. Voters don't necessarily have more choices than they used to—an increase in primaries and referenda having been offset by the influence of incumbency and money—but the *way* voters choose has changed dramatically. As a result of the weakening of political parties, voting behavior now closely resembles the consumption of products. The biggest political group is not Democrats or Republicans, but "independents," shopper-equivalents who've dropped brand loyalty in favor of product-by-product analysis. Last century two-thirds of voters went straight party line; in 1980 two-thirds split tickets. In theory, this means voters carefully weigh the candidate's policies, character, and history. In reality, it's nearly impossible to sort through a candidate's "stands" on the "issues" from a blizzard of untrustworthy ads, a newspaper editorial, or a blip on the TV news. Was he the one who wants a revolving loan fund for worker retraining or the one who gives flag burners early parole? No wonder voters, like shoppers, act impulsively or vote according to the wisdom of their favorite interest group. Many who vote for ballot initiatives or lower offices simply follow the recommendation of the local newspaper, which is like buying a car on the word of the local auto columnist. When I was voting absentee in New York I selected judicial candidates on the basis of gender and race since I knew little else about them. The ultimate political choice overload came in California in 1990, when voters received a 222-page ballot pamphlet to help them decide among twenty-eight initiatives.

Candidates have responded to the rise of the consumer-voter by turning to marketing professionals who've only made the voters' dilemma worse. In the 1950s political consultants were advertising men who selected a candidate attribute and then sold it, the way an automaker might remind consumers of a large car's natural advantages, like spaciousness and safety. Political consulting has evolved, though. Candidates now rely heavily on market researchers—i.e., the pollsters—trying less to determine what part of their essence they should highlight than what they should become to match voters' desires. Sometimes that means candidates become more responsive to public thinking, but more often it means politicians forget to consult (or have) their own core beliefs. Witness the breathtaking spectacle of pro-life pols who once assailed the supreme immorality of baby-killing quickly becoming pro-choice because of the supreme importance of polls. This "politics as consumption" (in the phrase of University of Rochester professor Robert Westbrook) seems to produce more gelatinous politicians—precisely the soft that voters have the hardest time judging.

Choice Erodes the Self. In theory, choice enables an individual to select the car, money market fund, or spouse that expresses herself most precisely. But if choice is self-definition, more choices mean more possible definitions. Kenneth Gergen, a professor of psychology at Swarthmore, argues in his new book, *The Saturated Self,* that the postmodern personality becomes "populated" with growing numbers of "selves" as it's bombarded by an ever increasing number of potential relationships from TV, travel, telephones, faxes, computers, etc. From

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an insecure sense of self, you then spiral toward what Gergen calls "multiphrenia," in which the besieged, populated self frantically flails about trying to take advantage of the sea of choices. This condition may never merit its own telethon, but as choices increase so do the odds that multiphrenia will strike, leaving the scars of perpetual self-doubt. It's why the people who work hardest to improve their appearance never seem to feel much better than before they sampled the offerings of the Self-Perfection Industry (exercise videos, customized makeup, cosmetic surgery, health food). They become like politicians with their own private pollsters; the quest to re-create virtually supplants whatever person was once there.

Choice Reduces Social Bonding. The proliferation of choice helps cause, and results from, another trend—social fragmentation. Together they ensure that Americans share fewer and fewer common experiences. A yuppie diet bears less and less resemblance to that of a lower-income family. I don't even know who's on the Wheaties box anymore because my cereal is located about ninety feet down the aisle. As marketers divide us into increasingly narrow segments, we inevitably see ourselves that way too. When there was one movie theater in a neighborhood, everyone sat under the same roof and watched the same film. Video rental stores enable you to be a movie junkie without ever having to sit next to another human being. Three decades ago, even when everyone was sitting in their own homes they were at least all watching "Gunsmoke." Today's viewing public scatters to its particular demographic niche on the cable dial.

Even the spiritual realm has evolved like a supermarket. "It has become a consumer-oriented, highly fragmented religious marketplace," says David Roozen, director of the Hartford Seminary for Social and Religious Research. In a buyer's market, the individual can select the religious institution with which he or she is most comfortable. But as each generation discards the nasty (or difficult) parts of the faith, religious traditions decay. Moreover, instead of integrating people of different backgrounds under the same theological roof, denominations sprout to appeal to smaller groups of like-minded people. (If, for example, you decide the followers of the teachings of Billy Meier's Space Brothers aren't your kind of people, you can turn to the Universe Society Church, which observes the wisdom of Fahsz, an extraterrestrial contacted by someone named Hal Wilcox.) The comedian Emo Philips tells a joke about discovering similarities in religious backgrounds with someone he just met. "I said [are you] Protestant or Catholic? He said, 'Protestant.' I said, 'Me Too! What franchise?' He says, 'Baptist.' I said, 'Me too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?' He says, 'Southern Baptist.' I said, 'Me Too!'" The two go back and forth in this vein. Finally, Emo asks, "'Northern conservative fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879 or Northern conservative fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?' And he says 'Northern conservative fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912.' And I said, 'Die Heretic!'"

How can we adapt to this world of choice? Some steps are being taken for us. The Food and Drug Administration recently announced rules to standardize product labels that should simplify our task in the supermarket. Some school districts have required uniforms in order to curb the clothing competition that has led to killings over sneakers. Regulatory agencies could further help by simply banning products they consider unsafe, rather than slapping on warning labels that force us to perform quickie risk assessment studies. The market itself will develop some innovations to help us cope. "Price clubs" have sprouted up in which customers shop at huge warehouses stocked with just a few brands, but very low prices. Bicycle stores now offer "hybrids" for those who can't decide between mountain, city, touring, and racing. But the general trend remains overwhelmingly toward market fragmentation.

Dealing with an abundance of choices mostly requires a mental reorientation. Choice overload helped me finally understand what was so offensive about the stereotypical yuppie obsession with "quality," of which I have often been guilty. It's not that some coffee beans aren't, in fact, more flavorful than others, it's that people who spend so much of their lives thinking about small differences become small people.

Imagine instead a world in which we used our choice brain lobes for the most important decisions and acted more arbitrarily on the rest. Perhaps you might select a brand name and buy all its products for the next four years, scheduling Choice Day during non-presidential election years. Or you might embrace the liberating powers of TV commercials. As everyone knows, ads brainwash us into choosing products through insidious appeals to sex or other animal urges. But sometimes it feels good to let an ad take us by the hand. A few years ago I had an epiphany while deciding what to eat for dinner. I looked in the refrigerator, thought about nearby restaurants and markets, and grew puzzled. Just then an ad came on the TV for Burger King, featuring a luscious Whopper with fake charcoal stripes painted with perfect symmetry across the juicy meat. I put on my coat and immediately walked, zombielike, to the nearby Burger King and ordered a Whopper. I found it exhilarating, because I knew it wasn't the behavior of a rational economic player, and that it didn't matter.

As the Twelve Steppers say, we must acknowledge our powerlessness. We cannot knowledgeably make even a fraction of the appropriate choices available. Say it out loud. Today I will make several wrong choices. Now, whether you've selected an inferior vacuum cleaner, bought the large soda when the jumbo was a better deal, or accidentally prayed to the wrong god—forgive yourself. If we took some joy in being bad choosers, or at least placed less value on being stellar consumers of unimportant things, we would be training ourselves to accept a few extra drops of imperfection in our lives. Somehow, that would seem more like progress than having the choice between polypropylene arch brace contours and a solar-powered argyle. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Dallas

Vietnam haunts Oliver Stone, who served there. That was clear enough in *Platoon*, which, faults and all, is the most scorching combat film about that war, and in *Born on the Fourth of July*, about a maimed survivor. For me, Stone's Vietnam experience is what lies behind **JFK** (Warner Bros.). In most of the plentiful comment about the picture, the implication has been that Stone wanted to make a film about John Kennedy's assassination and that, out of the many explanations of the crime, he chose a questionable one. This is backward, I'd say. I think he made this film because Jim Garrison's theory contends that Kennedy wanted to curtail American involvement in Vietnam while other powerful people wanted it to grow. Vietnam is what led Stone to Kennedy: he felt that the anti-Kennedy conspirators ultimately caused the Asian hell that he saw.

My theory about Stone is at least as sound as his about the assassination. He determined to do this film after reading Garrison's book, which (reportedly) argues that Kennedy was murdered by the military-industrial complex and its friends in order to increase the American presence in Vietnam. (Stone also acquired an assassination book by Jim Marrs.) He engaged the editor of Garrison's book, Zachary Sklar, to collaborate with him on the screenplay. The film posits that Kennedy had begun an American withdrawal—he had in fact ordered a thousand "advisers" to return—and that Lyndon Johnson conspired with tycoons and the Pentagon to prevent further withdrawals. (What Kennedy's future Vietnam policy might have been is far from certain, but even Tom Wicker, a severe critic of the film's historicity, concedes "that Kennedy might not have expanded the war as President Johnson did in 1964.") *JFK* begins with a clip of Eisenhower's attack on the military-industrial complex, and it ends with a statement of Vietnam casualties—58,000 Americans, millions of Asians. For Oliver Stone, set on his fiery if tendentious course, Dealey Plaza leads to the Tonkin Gulf.

Charges of exaggerations in the film, omissions, fantasies, have crammed newspapers and magazines for weeks. Stone's defense sidesteps many of the charges—about the Vietnam connection and other matters—and concentrates on what he now calls his prime purpose: to pillory the Warren Commission Report and other cover-ups. (He might have added that such a cover-up is not new: there are still unanswered questions about Lincoln's murder.) A comment in a recent issue of *The Economist* is relevant:

> To criticize the details of Mr. Stone's "theory" misses why it is so seductive. The barely stated premise of *JFK* is that the assassination of Kennedy was a historical watershed. Had he not been killed, everything would have been different. No Vietnam. No race riots. No drug culture. Instead, Camelot. It is a view Mr. Stone has expressed again and again in interviews. It is also a view shared, more or less consciously, by millions of Americans. If the assassination changed so much, the argument continues, it seems all the more implausible that it could have been the work of a lonely fool like Oswald; an event so big surely deserves a big villain, such as the military-industrial complex.

A film such as this has special responsibilities, which I don't mean to ignore; but first a word about something that its detractors tend to scant—*JFK* itself. The film is a whirlwind, a torrent. Its fierce main current, the Garrison story, sweeps along with attendant swirls and eddies. Stone keeps that story—and its references and hypotheses—as visible as possible, aiming at increased clarity rather than pyrotechnics, yet it is virtuoso work. He mixes actualities, like bits of the Zapruder film, with *seeming* actualities in color or in grainy black and white. (Objectors to this method presumably would have had him label his own work "simulation." A more appropriate label, if one is needed, would be "speculation.") Throughout the cascading film I kept wanting to see more, more, more—and it runs three hours. (It happened both times I saw *JFK*.)

Even when there's a sense of manipulation—Garrison meets an informant in D.C. in front of the Lincoln Memorial and they end their conversation with the Washington Monument in the background—it never seems shrewd cynicism, only a somewhat wide-eyed eagerness to believe. Very few Hollywood people today make films primarily out of conviction, particularly political conviction. Admittedly it's easy to overvalue *JFK* because it's a rarity that way, but it's also easy to undervalue it cinematically because of its political and historical garishness.

Garrison, the New Orleans district

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Antonia and Jane. *Two young women in London today, contending with sex and other matters in a bright and witty way. (Reviewed 12/2/91)* **Bugsy.** *Warren Beatty as the 1940s hood Bugsy Siegel, Annette Bening as his weather-wise mistress. Torrid love in the midst of crime and killings. (12/23/91)* **Kafka.** *It shows that Steven Soderbergh, who made* sex, lies, and videotape, *was no directorial flash in the pan. But this thriller, set in 1919 Prague with the author as hero, has a silly script. (1/6&13/92)* **Prospero's Books.** *Peter Greenaway's version of* The Tempest. *His pictures are gorgeous, if irrelevant. What matters is John Gielgud's reading of Prospero and some other roles—a magnificent example of a possibly dying Shakespearean art. (1/20/92)* **—SK**

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Educational Equity and Core Knowledge

By Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers

We measure a country's success not only by the average national income but also by how many people are living in poverty. Why not apply the same criteria to education? It's important that we have kids at the very top, and we also need a broad middle range of students—the country runs on them. But there's something wrong with an education system that leaves many kids far behind.

That's what U.S. education is doing, and if we need any confirmation of how *un*fair and *un*equal our education system is, we can get it by looking at *Science Achievement in Seventeen Countries* (Elmsford, N.Y.: Pergamon, 1988), which reports data from the latest International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) examination of 10, 14 and 18-year-olds. The results of this exam, which have been widely reported—and disputed—put U.S. kids close to the bottom. But the IEA report contains some other equally interesting measures of educational quality that have not gotten any attention.

For example, IEA took the lowest-scoring school in the top-scoring country—for the 14-year-old group, the country was Hungary—and asked what percentage of schools in the other participating countries scored lower than Hungary's lowest school. According to this measure, only 1 percent of Swedish and Japanese schools and 5 percent of Korean schools fell below Hungary's worst. Schools from the Netherlands and England performed relatively poorly—16 percent of the Dutch and 19 percent of the English schools were worse than Hungary's worst. But their performance was great compared to ours. Thirty percent—nearly one-third—of our schools achieved at a lower level than the worst-performing Hungarian school. Among developed countries, only Italy had a poorer record.

Instead of compensating for social inequalities, our schools unwittingly help to perpetuate them.

Data about the performance of our low-scoring students were also very discouraging. Looking at the scores of the bottom 25 percent of students, only kids from the Philippines had a lower average score than U.S. students, and our kids who had the lowest scores were performing at a level that was not much above chance.

Taken together, these measures suggest that the U.S. is one of the least successful of developed nations at preventing large numbers of students from getting an inadequate education. This may be partly a matter of financial equity. Other developed countries tend to have national education systems and therefore spend about the same amount of money per student. I'll take up this issue in a later column. But E.D. Hirsch, author of *Cultural Literacy*, suggests another reason.

Some people say our results are poor in comparison with Japan's or Korea's because those countries are homogeneous and ours is not. But Hirsch says that a multicultural society is no bar to achieving educational equity: Good results have more to do with whether or not a country has a curriculum that specifies a certain body of core knowledge that teachers are responsible for teaching and kids for learning. In an unpublished paper called "Fairness and Core Knowledge," Hirsch points out that Japan and Hungary, which scored well according to every measure, have such curriculums; England, which scored badly, did not, though it has since taken steps to adopt one.

Hirsch also links the success that French and German schools have with children who do not belong to the dominant culture—and whom we would consider disadvantaged—with their schools' emphasis on core knowledge. According to Hirsch, West German schools bring the children of Turkish "guest workers" up to grade level despite "enormous educational handicaps." And in France, the children of immigrants who are born in France and attend French schools from the beginning achieve at a slightly higher level than French children who come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

Why should teaching core knowledge make such a difference? And why should it be particularly helpful for disadvantaged children? The immigrant children Hirsch describes are able to compensate for differences that might handicap them in German and French schools because the education systems have specified in detail the material that all youngsters are supposed to learn. Standards like these, Hirsch says, "enable tutors to focus on the specific knowledge that students need in order to attain grade level." They set up clear expectations for the kids and their teachers, and they give kids a foundation on which to build in succeeding grades.

In U.S. schools, what is studied and in what grade is still largely a matter of local choice. So schools and school districts are free to hold students up to high standards or, as often happens in the case of disadvantaged children, to decide the kids can't do the work and give them a watered-down curriculum. The trouble with this is that it virtually guarantees these children will fall behind their more advantaged peers—and never catch up. So instead of compensating for social inequalities, our schools unwittingly help to perpetuate them.

Some people have been very critical of Hirsch's proposals on the grounds that they try to impose the dominant culture on groups that would rather have their children learn their own culture. But the thrust of Hirsch's proposal is egalitarian. He believes that by starting early and by giving all children the same core knowledge to learn, we can prevent the creation of an educational underclass.

E.D. Hirsch's paper is available for $2 by calling 1-800-238-3233 or writing to Core Knowledge, 2012-B Morton Dr., Charlottesville, Va. 22901.

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attorney in November 1963, is worried by the way the Kennedy assassination has been investigated. Three years later he finds reasons to prosecute Clay Shaw, a prominent New Orleans businessman, on conspiracy charges in connection with the murder. Government agencies like the CIA are mentioned. (The homosexuality of Shaw and friends is dramatized, not as criminal but as a linkage in this group.) Garrison's evidence presents questions about the Kennedy murder that are still unanswered; but he loses the case. (A closing title informs us that Shaw, who died in 1974, was subsequently identified by Richard Helms as a CIA agent, but of course this doesn't necessarily tie Shaw to the killing.) Garrison remains convinced that powerful forces have conspired to conceal the truth, which may not be known until 2029, when the files of the House Select Committee on Assassinations will be opened.

Kevin Costner plays Garrison, and patently the real Garrison was cosmeticized in several ways. Probably this was part of the price of getting a highly bankable star for the role and of keeping him bankable. As a Garrison fictionalized in temperament and focus, Costner is engaging. He's not a powerful actor, but he's a friendly one. The film is capped with his lengthy address to the jury in the Shaw trial. I'd suggest that if Costner is going to play Jimmy Stewart parts he ought to listen to Stewart's voice. Costner's is limited.

Sissy Spacek has the stock, tiresome role of a wife—this time named Mrs. Garrison—imploring her busy husband to spend more time with her and the children. (One curious Freudian moment: the news of Robert Kennedy's assassination proves a sexual stimulant to Mr. and Mrs. G.) Tommy Lee Jones plays Shaw with unexpected poise and elegance. Kevin Bacon, as one of his homosexual friends, has perfect modulation, attack, implication. Joe Pesci, in the best performance of his that I've seen, plays David Ferrie, another of the gay band, bewigged and with false eyebrows, moving us with his fear for his life. Donald Sutherland is the Deep Throat of this story (a character synthesized from several men) who meets Garrison in Washington; he invests his one long sequence with the authenticity that is as natural to him as breathing. John Candy, as a lawyer friend of Garrison's in New Orleans, shows yet again that he is not just a fat man employed because of his size, he is a genuine actor. Ed Asner, cast against type, plays a brutal reactionary private eye; Jack Lemmon manages to overact even in the small role of his sidekick. These major people in minor roles are votes of confidence in Stone, no more clearly so than with Walter Matthau's brief appearance as Senator Russell Long. (The real Garrison is hastily visible as Earl Warren.)

Robert Richardson, Stone's usual cinematographer, has given the flashbacks *verité* and the "present" sequences a prevalent golden-red "southern" light. The editors, wizards both, were Joe Rutshing and Pietro Scalia. With Stone, all three of these men have made a film whose onward course can almost be *heard*—the whole notes, the half and quarter and eighth and sixteenth notes, the trills, the glissandi. Consistent with this aural image, the film seems to have an unceasing low roar under it until there's a sudden break for the quiet in which Costner makes his long courtroom speech.

Cinematically, *JFK* is almost a complete success. (The tedious Garrison family scenes are a bow to necessity.) But is it fitting that the very power of this film should serve questionable history? The customary acceptance of historical inaccuracy in art works—in Shakespeare, Schiller, Shaw, for instance—is slight defense here. Or to take a film example: few historians would endorse the values, or all the details, in John Ford westerns, but to everyone save the mentally unbalanced, Ford's values and details are the lineaments of an American romance; and contemporary application is slight. Viewers of *JFK*, however, might find themselves shaken in their views of government, society, the media. Certainly this disruption might be salutary for us—if it were more soundly based.

The whole situation resolves, for me, to a state of tension among five elements. First, *JFK* is a fine piece of filmmaking. Second, it is a passionate work in an art that is mostly treated as an industry. Third, it distorts facts in the assassination theory it presents. Fourth, it strongly underscores our incomplete knowledge about the assassination and possible conspiracy. (Let's all check this in 2029.) Fifth, although the proof that Kennedy was killed because of the war is very slim, the film is one more outcry against the waste and horror of Vietnam. As with a prism, we can rotate this set of elements so that we are looking at only one of them at a time. But even while we are looking at only one of them, all the other elements are true. •

Robert Brustein on Theater

The Dreaming of the Bones

Irish theater, for reasons that presently remain elusive, seems to be having another renaissance, at least to judge by the number of productions visiting these shores. One-man shows based on literature by James Joyce and Brendan Behan are circulating on tour; Samuel Beckett has become the favorite subject of international conferences; Sean O'Casey's **The Shadow of a Gunman** is just completing a successful visit to a number of American cities, including Boston and New York; and Brian Friel's imported **Dancing at Lughnasa** is firmly settled on Broadway after unanimously positive notices from exuberant reviewers.

Seeing the O'Casey and Friel plays back to back reveals how much they have in common with each other and with the whole corpus of twentieth-century Irish writing. *The Shadow of a Gunman* takes place in a Dublin tenement during the early '20s, and owes a lot to Zola and Ibsen. *Dancing at Lughnasa* is set in the '30s in rural County Donegal, and combines Chekhovian techniques with nostalgic memory devices borrowed from Tennessee Williams (*The Glass Menagerie*). Yet, despite their international influences, both are concerned with obsessive Irish themes, notably the collision between romance and reality that results from the national disposition for mythologizing and dreaming. In his 1949 book, *The Irish: A Character Study*, Sean O'Faolain identified this leitmotiv as a prime characteristic of the Celtic nature—a conclusion Bernard Shaw had reached forty-five years earlier in *John Bull's Other Island*:

> Oh, the dreaming, the dreaming, the torturing heartscalding, never-satisfying dreaming.... An Irishman's imagination never lets him alone, never convinces him, never satisfies him; but it makes him that he can't face reality nor deal with it nor handle it nor conquer it.

This could be a perfect description of the characters in John Millington Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1907).

This appetite for fancy and imagination results in an incurable romanticism that tends to confound fact with fiction and history with myth. It may also

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explain why the early Church chose not to conquer the pagan gods that were thought to inhabit the island so much as to assimilate them. (Saint Patrick, for example, was actually a Christian version of a primitive deity named Dagda.) Indeed, pagan myth and Christian scripture are not always distinguishable in the Irish mind. Joyce, in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, wrote of how his friend Mat Davin's imagination was shaped by the "broken lights of Irish myth. He stood towards the myth ... in the same attitude as towards the Roman Catholic religion, the attitude of a dull-witted serf." As for Yeats's concept of the Celtic Twilight, this was an effort both to celebrate these myths and convert them to poetic purposes. Many of his earlier poems, notably "The Unappeasable Host," describe the dualism of paganism and Christianity that is assumed to coexist uneasily in the spiritual universe of Ireland.

O'Casey, who was reared in an atmosphere of abject poverty, shared this sense of incredible incongruity from his early manhood. The land shaped for him by story and myth—a land of love, laughter, and pagan freedom—was nowhere to be found in the slums of Dublin. What he saw instead was despair, avarice, filth, drunkenness, and priestly oppression. In his first three plays—*The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926)—it was his intention to represent, honestly and painstakingly, the Dublin of his experience—its squalor, violence, and pestilence. But Irish realism is almost an oxymoron, and while he never adopted myths or dreams as a panacea for poverty (except perhaps in *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy*), in the '30s and '40s he began to substitute myths of his own making in a utopian vision of a future world under the flag of communism (*The Star Turns Red*).

By the time of his first play, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, O'Casey had not yet formulated an alternative political position. Instead, it was the purpose of this "slum dramatist" (as he was called) to examine the awful repercussions of dreaming away reality. Donal Davoren, a would-be poet, is caught in the grip of other people's illusions, which he is reluctant to unmask. The Romantic Minnie Powell thinks he is a gunman "on the run" for the IRA, and when a real gunman drops off a stash of bombs in Davoren's flat, she throws away her own life in an effort to protect him from the Black and Tans. Davoren is left with his shame and guilt, an imaginary hero, a shadow of a gunman, doomed to spend the rest of his life with the fatal consequences of his imposture: "Oh, Donal Davoren, shame is your portion now till the silver cord is loosened and the golden bowl be broken. Oh, Davoren, Donal Davoren, poet and poltroon, poltroon and poet."

Around this posturing hero O'Casey collects what would soon become a familiar crowd of storytellers, drunks, and swaggerers, including Seumas Shields, his peddler-roommate, the Orangeman Adolphus Grigson and his wife, and the Dickensian malapropper Mrs. Gallogher. As would also soon become common in O'Casey, a woman proves to be the major victim of male heroics, as well as the only truly courageous figure in the play. Minnie Powell is a hero-worshiper whom Davoren is only too eager to impress, though she would like nothing better than to see him die for his country. But by offering to hide the bomb stash and being shot through the "buzzom" as a result, it is she, not Davoren, who becomes a sacrifice to the cause of Irish freedom. For O'Casey, it is not the male revolutionaries who carry the burden of suffering but the female civilians—Minnie Powell, Juno Boyle, Nora Clitheroe.

Appropriately enough, it is a woman—O'Casey's daughter, Shivaun O'Casey—who directed the revival I saw at the Symphony Space with a company

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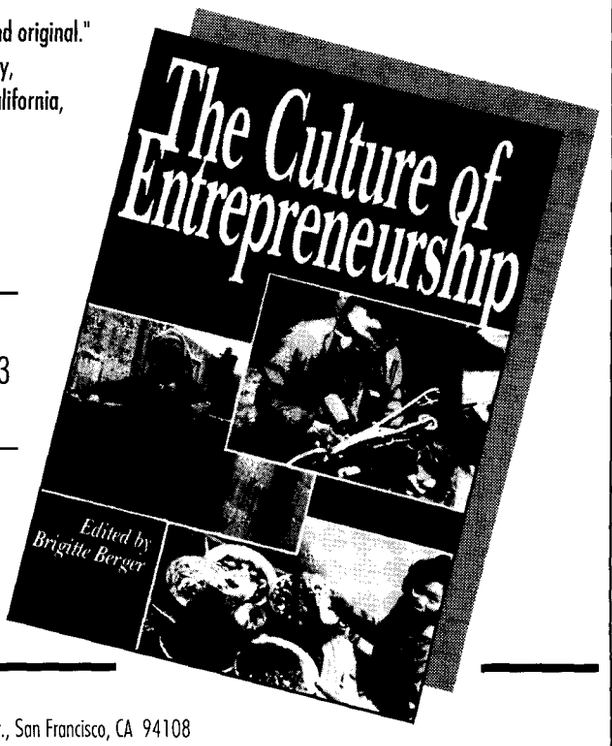

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drawn from her theater in Newry, Northern Ireland. She has staged it with true feeling both for the tenement comedy and gunmetal grimness of the work, disguising its occasional thinness of plot with characterizations of richness and depth. Niall Buggy is particularly effective as the belligerent Seumas Shields, hopping into his torn pants without removing his pajamas, and generalizing wildly about the Irish character, in a performance that instantly puts him in a class with the legendary Irish comedians F.J. McCormick, Jack McGowran, and Barry McGovern. Michelle Fairley is enchanting as the idealistic Minnie Powell; Ian Fitzgibbon enacts an appropriately grandiloquent Davoren; and Pauline Flanagan creates a splendid Mrs. Grigson, puling and nattering like a demented sewing machine. Indeed, virtually the entire cast gives strong reinforcement to a playwright who, if not yet quite mature in his first play, showed all the signs of soon becoming a true chronicler of disappointed dreams.

Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* (Plymouth Theatre) is a more fully developed play than *The Shadow of a Gunman.* But though it deals with some of the same themes—notably the tension between paganism and Christianity, between romance and reality—it lacks O'Casey's punch and passion. I have always found something a little restrained and commonplace about Friel's writing, and the rustic domesticity of *Dancing at Lughnasa* makes it no exception. For all its charm, the play has virtually no incident and the characters are tame.

Friel owes as large a debt to Chekhov as O'Casey does to Ibsen (and later on, Strindberg); yet he captures only the surface of Chekhov's apparent aimlessness, rarely the depths of crisis and upheaval. "People are having a meal at table, just having a meal," Chekhov wrote in describing his method, "but at the same time their happiness is being created, or their lives are being smashed up." Friel's five sisters each have some unhappiness in their spinster lives, generally relating to unrequited love (the absence of eligible men in this world is appalling). But the most they can summon in rebellion is to utter an occasional tart word or, at the climactic moment of the play, to break into dance.

Dancing, generally to music of the '30s played on a radio called Marconi, is in fact Friel's central metaphor, and he connects it with the pagan rituals of the vestigial harvest deity Lugh. The appeal of paganism is further enhanced by the career of the sisters' uncle, Father Jack—a "leper priest" who, having spent many years in Ryanga, is suspected by the Church of having converted to African tribal customs. If you're expecting something like the unspeakable things experienced by Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* ("the horror, the horror"), forget it. The most unusual experiences Jack can relate to titillate the sisters are goat and calf sacrifice, polygamy, face-painting, and ritual dancing.

One sister, Chris, has had a child after an affair with an itinerant Welshman, Gerry. (Michael, the son, is the narrator, and also appears as a child.) The oldest, the puritanical Kate, is a teacher and an advocate of Christian morals. Agnes and the rather simpleminded Rose are seamstresses working at home. Maggie, perhaps the most tragic of the five because she is the most spirited, is condemned to permanent spinsterhood. Nobody gets what she wants, and Michael—like Tom Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*—escapes from the house and from these five wounded Lauras, only to realize that he is still bound by vivid dreams and anguished memories—dreams and memories of dancing.

Dancing at Lughnasa is a sweet and sometimes eloquent play, written with strong sympathies for all its characters. I found the acting of the men somewhat weak, particularly Gerard McSorley's ineffectual efforts to play the child Michael and Donal Donnelly's rather wimpish stab at the spoiled priest Father Jack (a shade of the great Irish characterizations). But the women are splendid, with Dearbhla Molloy as the warm and waspish Maggie topping a strong [illegible]sterhood. Still, the themes of the play have already been better explored by more vigorous playwrights, and the idea of a Pan figure (the Welshman) unsettling the women like a fox in a henhouse was long ago exhausted by D.H. Lawrence and Tennessee Williams. In short, the play seems to me derivative, tepid, and a little banal—a puny evocation of a time when Irish writers dreamed mighty dreams. •

The Art of Narcissism

BY DAVID BROMWICH

The Runaway Soul by Harold Brodkey

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 835 pp., $30)

The words "narcissist" and "solipsist" are sometimes used interchangeably, but they have very different meanings. A narcissist sees himself in everything. A solipsist sees everything in himself. The narcissist has a chance of becoming a great artist, in genres related to the monologue. The solipsist is more likely to act with some human decency, notwithstanding a certain blindness to the reality of other people. Harold Brodkey frankly presents himself as a narcissist and a solipsist at once; it could even be said that he makes recognition of the fact a part of his métier. He talks a good deal, in writing, about being his kind of writer; about living the life he has to live in order to publish his life. So placed, and appearing with a first novel, he has sought to give a new sense to the publisher's standby "long awaited." This book has waited until the author is in his 60s, and its length makes a barely expedient compromise with interminability. That it should have come out a mere 800 pages may seem, to the appetite of the monologuist, hardly better than its not coming out at all, but a compromise had to be struck somewhere.

Brodkey must have felt that the book was needed to correct an anomaly of his reputation. He has been known as an intense consciousness, rather than a tale-teller, historian of manners, satirist, or "sensibility in prose"—writerly roles that he scorns or gladly fails to satisfy. The reputation grows out of his short stories; but there was a question how the stories added up. *First Love and Other Sorrows* (1958) was the work of a young man writing with careful poignance in *The New Yorker* idiom of the '50s. Twenty-seven years later, a bigger and much more generous collection, *Stories in an Almost Classical Mode*, broke new ground entirely. These stories had no separate subjects, for their concern was the workings of a single mind upon its experience. The stories themselves were an experience, with prose either speculative or notational, but capable of the most exacting shifts of weight. Buried among the rhapsodic lusters of "Innocence" and "Angel," or the sheer anecdotage of "Largely an Oral History of My Mother," were the broad lines of an autobiography. The novel is not quarried from

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these sources, precisely, but they first mapped out its terrain.

The Runaway Soul is an attempt to give the autobiography whole. It divides roughly into two parts, sex and family; and if one says that it comes to terms with sex and not with family, that is only part of the story. A fruitless effort of self-comprehension in the latter realm comes to seem a motive of the hero's absorbing indulgence in the former, so that the two aspects of the life are successfully made to throw shadows on each other.

Two aspects—just two? The ordinary pursuits of status, power, money, all the ideal or material objects of a personal culture: these things hardly matter to Brodkey's characters, and the omission is interesting. Mostly it is liberating. His characters are passengers in their bodies. They are not, for the most part, pleasant, but they have souls, and all are in some way questers: the furthest thing from consumers, calculators, social creatures. If they stumbled into Gibbsville, Pennsylvania, they would be arrested and given jobs, clothes, and proper descriptions.

The theorist of the novel René Girard has a term for the exploits of the kind of character that Brodkey leaves out, the kind that after all forms the bulk of the personae of fiction generally. They act, Girard says, from "mediated desire." A character, A, thinks or feels something about B because of C; his motives are inseparable from his knowledge that C, too, is feeling something about B; and this is tied up with A's feeling something about C as well. This web of relations vanishes in Brodkey. For him, there are only A and B in any given scene (whether solemn or trivial, at twenty pages or 200) and in any containable tract of experience. What A thinks of B is connected not with any imaginable C, but rather with what A thinks of A. Brodkey speaks, in a revealing phrase, of "the absurd adventure of paying attention to what one thinks, that means having a career, that means being a grown-up in a scale of would-be masterful agency and urgency." One notices the casual disdain of "absurd" and "would-be." Worldliness, maturity, with all their daily pressure and weight, have no claim on his characters, who allude to these estimable qualities but know them to be unreal.

The Runaway Soul has a first-person voice—first person without limit, in a way that the narrator-hero suggests with a single phrase about himself: "contentiously male." This is said with some pride, and one understands the pride a little. One also understands the post-adolescent girl lying underneath the hero, who, somewhere in his incessant groping and talking, says to him finally: "I WANT YOU TO SHUT UP FOR A WHILE AND I WANT YOU TO DO IT NOW." She speaks for the reader, and the author seems to know it. There is nothing complacent about these self-reflections. The book is someone's argument with himself—a wrangle of unharmonizing perceptions. He can make an early self-portrait out of a few geographical and physiognomic facts, and then say uncozeningly: "If I loved you, this is the creature who would love you." There is distance in those words, as there is in: "Part of what I look like is that I am the person who has had my life." At the point where narcissism can turn into a compulsive desire to charm, something goes cold in this author. Few readers will love him. Still, it is, with him, a point of artistic honor not to strive to be lovable.

Wiley Silenowicz is the name of the hero. His important relations are with his adoptive mother, Lila; her husband, S.L.; and above all with their daughter, Nonie. It takes an effort to recall that these are surrogate parents, that much of the book happens in St. Louis, one long episode in New York, and so on. Also, that the hero has a dead father about whom nothing is said but much may be thought. Of S.L.'s not being his real father, he says early on that "the grief is like a barely moving but very strong wind." That wind is everywhere in the book; but the landscape it passes through is entirely of the mind. Wiley's virtual parents S.L. and Lila appear as voices of garrulous wisdom—Lila the more dialectical, S.L. the more rebarbative of the two. S.L. nicknames Wiley "pisherkins" and covers him with jokes, complaints, bribes of affection. Lila says: "Remember Eve in the Bible? Well, I'm Madame Trouble myself in my own little way." Between them, in the father especially, one can see the sources of Brodkey's elaborate prose: "He said things over and over, but he said them differently each time."

By contrast with all these, his stepsister is an opaque character, and yet Nonie is the most important fact of Wiley's life. She is believed by Lila to have murdered two infant siblings some years apart, and is certainly a born well-poisoner, a manipulator of people and a destroyer of things. The whole book revolves around the hero's questions about her. Is Nonie just what normal

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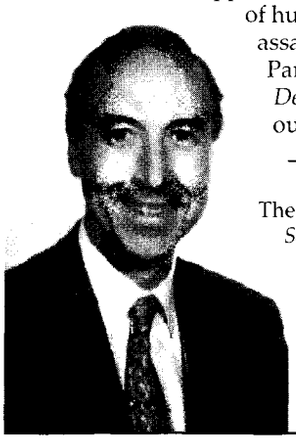

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people are like (only in more tacit ways, by cunning, evasion, or indifference)? And am I like that, too? Maybe the questions are well deferred to the last pages. But a larger evasion haunts the narrative when it can likewise defer any affective response to Nonie and her life: she is a force that Wiley cannot begin to grasp, and the same book that keeps pointing to her also leaves her behind as an irritant. If there is honesty in this treatment, it is the honesty of experience undigested and impossible to digest. One feels that the disturbance has been rendered ominous at too early a stage and then left hanging too long. A report of her fate near the end is almost a parody of the modern way with such events in fiction: "Nonie burned to death; I said that, didn't I? A portable heater shorted out; this is what I was told. And she was drunk."

Wiley has not in fact said it until then, but he might as well have said it, for the telling of his life observes no chronology or associative rhythm. Brodkey puts things in where he feels like putting them; what matters is the sensation from sentence to sentence. Something should be said, therefore, about the prose of *The Runaway Soul.* The opening paragraph gives a fair impression of Brodkey's strengths and weaknesses:

> I was slapped and hurried along in the private applause of birth—I think I remember this. Well, I imagine it anyway—the blind boy's rose-and-mild-and-gray-walled (and salty) aquarium, the aquarium overthrown, the uproar in the woman-barn ... the fantastic sloppiness of one's coming into existence, one's early election, one's senses in the radiant and raw stuff of howlingly sore and unexplained registry in the new everywhere, immensely unknown, disbelief and shakenness, the awful contamination of actual light. I think I remember the breath crouched in me and then leaping out yowlingly: this uncancellable sort of beginning.

This is effortful writing, successful to some degree. The fragmentary last phrase is memorable. But what of "private applause" and "the awful contamination of actual light"? Generously strewn throughout the book, such phrases suggest a premeditated striving for effect that allows no space for wonder. One has seen (not in fiction) babies at a moment like the one described by Brodkey, to whom the light was not a contamination. It is rather as if they were looking at the light, considering the medium of light, as far as possible, objectively.

The Runaway Soul has many passages of far less distinction. But even in the most sounded and measured cadences, one's disbelief is often prompted as here: the thing has been gone about with such purposeful eloquence that some imagination is lost. It is different with Wiley's sex—his going half way with boys, in the "oddly exposed, semi-blazing, good-bad time" that adolescence is full of; and, in the chapter called "Ora: New York, 1956," his going further with a woman. Here the writing finds some savor in each moment:

> I twitch, flinch, stiffen in potency of a degree—which I appreciate and am kinged by (as in the last row of a checkerboard)—and am unsteady on, as if on one stilt: this is inside the curious bubble of the reality of having a human potency, somewhat *democratically*—i.e., more gamblingly, less willed than if I were costumed, angrily brutal for real as playacting, and assertive on my own and without her.
>
> That it is, in that sense, a free erection—as in a *free* country—and joint—and *nice*—but, of course, corrupt and based on various deals and inequities, that erects me further—I feel the moments pushing, in a linked way, in a kind of heat of linkage, or with an almost hot, or flame-heated linkage of what might be called sexual *effects*—the power, say, of her eyes now that they are open and then the exposed breasts as vulnerability and pride and the thing between her legs like the top of the skull of a small cat and stirring catlike: it is a peninsular half-motion in which everything stirs: the wind of the passage of time lifts us, blows, moves—caresses us as if we were dozing on a train and a stranger or all the strangers there were very lightly kissing and stroking and gazing.

Two episodes like this, occupying four hours of real time ten years apart, take up approximately 300 pages of the novel. The exposed tenderness of this way of writing comes from Whitman, and it is managed with narrative consistency and buoyancy—my "half-athletic, pectoralled, sometimes-praised chest." The vanity, the pride in the gaze, the desire to sustain the reverie and to be seen to sustain it, all these seem part of a "contentiously male" trap. But perhaps Wiley knows that, too.

It is curious to see, in a passage like this, how being touched by a single person, Wiley needs to sharpen the stimulus by imagining many persons. His imagined voyeurs or public sharers are the only crowd that the narrative presents—this, indeed, is a rare scene in having two actually observed characters and not just a nominal two in the mind of one. Apart from a constant combative sensualism with women, and the projection of a wholly passive comradeship, the chief temptation to Wiley's solitude seems to be an ideal of homosexual love. Wiley announces in passing that he is "androgynous"—a wrong choice of word—and acts are mentioned that are not described. The aimless flirtation with this subject is punished by some stretches of overripe prose; Wiley describes his youthful companion Remsen as having

> a notion, an idea of actual love-and-friendship between men, something necessary, but something obscure to him—he is partly a man (a young man)—sublimely strong, half-captured, sublimely dangerous—and subject to holy messages (so to speak)—and he had an idea of loneliness—alienation rethought and placed in a suburb—and of despair, *acedie*—modern and not necessarily Christian but firmly affixed to an idea of God's absence in some physical sense which involved there being just two of them, as on the river—or as in a dream anyway, as I go rushing on—like me on my bike—among trees, in the perspective of the suburb's streets, under the vast, colossally beautiful, truly immense Middle Western sky.

Here "sublimely strong" and "sublimely dangerous" have not been salvaged from cliché; the elaborations ("a notion, an idea"; "loneliness—alienation"), so far from suggesting refinement, come from a want of precise motives and the last few lines are beginning writing, strange to be shown by the author of "Angel."

The unevenness of the prose in *The Runaway Soul* relaxes its claim on the reader. This slackening appears in local as well as general effects. The admittedly useful word "thing" is tossed in almost anywhere, up and down the scale of values, as an all-purpose synonym for matter, point, question, obsession, and moral meaning. And the passage from one fictive mode to another takes place on almost as sliding a scale: dialogue, soliloquy, flashback, montage, and simple transcription—whole pages composed of strings of sentences uttered by Lila Silenowicz. In some novels of comparable scope you are lost if you fail to read every word. With *The Runaway Soul,* you are sunk if you try to read every word. The author seems often in a race with himself, but at the same time to be watching the race, and the consequent motion is a ponderous jumble of legs. And yet a certain consistency, partly repellent, partly memorable, does emerge from the deliberate mess of imprecision. The psychology of the hero and the texture of the writing are as continuous as a cocoon.

As an attempt to imagine the lives of people, this book is a monstrous imposition. The same, oddly, does not hold true for its sense of the accidental coherence and chaos in a single life. Thoreau says at the start of a poem: "I am a parcel of vain strivings tied / By chance bonds together, / Dangling this way and that"—and Wiley, and Brodkey, are something like that; not trailing clouds of glory, but dragging a half-sister or soul-ancestor

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whose name is Nonie. The book ends with a memory of her, after her actual death, and it ends in the past and the present:

> I embraced demon-filth Nonie. She had her arms around killer-trash Wiley. We are insiders. The enmity, the hate, is real. It is very real. We twine arms and legs and *necks*. These childish hugs of different creatures, the sense of two lives being present—I remember the considerable excellence of how mutual it was despite the disparities in size and mind and state of mind and in the passions and degrees of violence between us . . . at that time. We know this about each other at this moment of the child's peculiar victory—half-victory; we know this, *too*. Among the knowledges that were there . . . We huddle and combine.

Such, one comes to feel, are the relations between an ego and its other selves. Far from the scene are the hopes of fiction for self-knowledge: this is not one of "the knowledges that were there." To the felicities of art, as to its defeats, Wiley the runaway soul seems at last to have grown indifferent. In the end, this book says, people are what they are. They can think and feel; maybe they can change the shape of their chaos. But, ultimately, they do not change much. The author includes himself in the judgment, and he does so without a trace of self-satisfaction.

DAVID BROMWICH teaches English at Yale University and is the author most recently of *A Choice of Inheritance: Self and Community from Edmund Burke to Robert Frost* (Harvard University Press).

Amateur Hour

BY STEPHEN SESTANOVICH

For A New Russia by Anatoly Sobchak

(The Free Press, 191 pp., $22.95)

Almost three years ago, near the end of a long local election meeting in Leningrad, a first-time political candidate stood at the microphones, suddenly aware that to impress the voters after hours of droning by other speakers he would have to discard his carefully prepared remarks and say something from the heart. Fortunately his muse did not fail him. "Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech popped into my mind," Anatoly Sobchak recalls, and so he announced that he, too,

> had a dream: of a time when there would be no ward meetings or preliminary selection of nominees; when electors would be able to nominate a candidate without having their closed-door meetings "protected" by squads of public security volunteers and militia; when greedy, incompetent leaders would lose the power to reduce our lives to absurdity; when the minister of land improvement and water resources who'd concealed an immense budget deficit, and the chairman of the Supreme Court, who'd made his career by denouncing his colleagues, would find themselves out of a job.

It wouldn't have worked everywhere, and it will probably never work in St. Petersburg again, but Sobchak, describing the "hush" that fell over the audience when he finished, tells the story without embarrassment. In the Soviet Union's first real election campaign, only the Bolsheviks' clunky, seventy-year-old slogans were clichéd. All else—even "I Have a Dream"—seemed refreshing, incisive, spontaneous, honest.

This vignette from the Soviet hustings helps to drive home one of the principal themes of Sobchak's book: that the campaign to topple Leninism was in the hands of "political amateurs." Before deciding, at the age of 51, to seek a seat in Mikhail Gorbachev's reformed parliament, Sobchak had been neither a party member nor a dissident activist. Virtually his entire career had been spent teaching law in Leningrad. The author of twelve books, he claims that he had given no thought to running for office until a junior colleague (and former pupil) brought up his name at a meeting of the university's law faculty.

Even after impressive electoral victories, Sobchak and the other new members of the Congress of People's Deputies had little reason to think that they would be able to overcome their amateurism and accomplish anything lasting. They were housed like college students, one to a tiny room, in the gigantic Hotel Moskva just outside the Kremlin. They had neither offices nor staffs. They had only the flimsiest organization inside parliament

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itself, no organization whatever in the country as a whole, and next to no plan for what to do next.

Sobchak, who is now the mayor of St. Petersburg, describes the improvisations of these novice politicians, and the surprise they felt when their efforts began to succeed. Written in the course of 1990, with a gloomy "epilogue" on the Baltic crackdown of January 1991 and an upbeat "afterword" on the August coup, his book is an inevitably disjointed account of the revolution (all the more disjointed because the American edition has been slimmed down to keep it interesting for the general reader). Still, it sheds light on a question that, in our enthusiasm for what has happened, we are probably not sufficiently puzzled by. Why, against their own expectations and ours, did the amateurs succeed? Why was the Soviet party-state so bad at defending itself?

As an explanation of the nomenklatura's weakness, Sobchak is especially struck by the mediocre human material that he encounters. The ancien régime, he finds, was run by "a uniquely undistinguished breed of functionaries," even the ablest of whom had very little idea of where they were going. Yegor Ligachev, the Politburo member who tried hardest and longest to restrain Gorbachev, may have had a "shrewd peasant wit," but he was unable to acquire the "social and political cultivation" that would have made him a more formidable leader. A stroke of luck, says Sobchak—because "the last thing we needed was *sophisticated* neo-Stalinists." In his version of the drama, it mattered a great deal that the Communists had become—in Mill's phrase—the "stupid party." Last August, when Sobchak had to dissuade the commander of the Leningrad garrison from joining the Moscow plotters, he disarmed him with this contemptuous question: "General, can't you see what nonentities these people are?"

More than a generation ago Zbigniew Brzezinski reached the same conclusion: that the Soviet state had suffered an appalling decline in the quality of its leadership, and was now run by a "new generation of clerks." But disdain for the Soviet elite usually coexisted, in both the West and the Soviet Union, with a real awe of politicians who had been able to acquire virtually unchecked power. Surely this achievement suggested some sort of talent? The Stalinist order was considered an extremely hard political school, whose competitive rigors elevated ruthless geniuses above mere thugs and time-servers. At least by reputation, Yuri Andropov was perhaps the supreme product of the sifting by which the system identified those who could best preserve it. Andrei Gromyko's alleged endorsement of Gorbachev as the new party leader in 1985 (nice smile, iron teeth) expressed the old guard's satisfaction that the right man had been found again.

Yet no matter how talented the boss may have been, and no matter how tough the nomenklatura's selection procedures may once have been, it seems clear that by the end the Soviet system as a whole was manned by mediocrities. Sobchak's description of the elite suggests that excessive job security was a large part of the problem. The ruling caste was accountable to no one, and so its members could "commit blunder after blunder without fear." Stalinism was perhaps too demanding a school, but its much mellowed successor, Brezhnevism, had clearly become too easy. Almost anyone could rise in it; and having risen, almost no one fell. (This was one reason that Gorbachev called Brezhnev's tenure the era of stagnation.) Once the system ceased to be based on the survival of the fittest, survival itself could not long be guaranteed.

Revolutions, of course, are not always won by the side with the highest IQ, and even the nonentities of the nomenklatura, who exercised near-total control over Soviet society, would not have been toppled by any ordinary challenge. By the early '80s, for example, they had crushed the dissident movement into insignificance. Constant harassment, occasional beatings, a network of informers, the well-chosen prosecution, a wholly elastic legal code, an empire of prison camps, forced emigration for the worst trouble-makers, a life of perks for those who could be bought: these techniques allowed the regime to laugh off the threat posed by a few human rights activists. Gorbachev's perestroika, by contrast, suddenly confronted the party elite with a task for which it was completely, and dangerously, unprepared: holding its own in half-democratized politics.

Early in the campaign to elect the Congress of People's Deputies in 1989, Sobchak says, it became clear that many party bosses hadn't the faintest idea of how to do something as simple as conduct—not to say, control—a ward meeting. Because the rules had been changed, the political struggles of perestroika were not really as one-sided as they seemed. They pitted amateurs on the outside against amateurs on the inside. The skills and the habits with which the keepers of the old order had maintained their position did not help them to bend the new rules to advantage. It is astonishing, to take just one example, that in the several rounds of elections that were held after 1989 there were so few allegations of fraud. The explanation may be simple: no one really knew how to do it. The incumbents' experience was limited to truly gigantic lies, not small workaday ones. In the old days, when officials routinely announced the winning candidate's vote as 98 or 99 percent, they were actually telling the truth, or close to it. It would have been far better preparation for the tumult of perestroika to learn to operate a system in which the winners got only 55 or 60 percent—but the result was fixed.

In its heyday the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was a model for totalitarians everywhere. The organization that Sobchak describes—his term is "melancholy Bolsheviks"—was, by contrast, an astoundingly complacent political machine. It no longer operated on the premise that thwarting the people's will is hard work. In the new world of electoral competition, the Bolsheviks' idea of how to defend themselves did not go much beyond dirty tricks—trying to discredit the insurgent democrats by spreading rumors of financial or sexual peccadillos and the like. The twentieth century's longest running totalitarian dictatorship, facing a mortal danger, seems to have expected to prop itself up with negative campaign ads.

Even here the Communists were unprepared for the democrats' resourcefulness. Sobchak tells of responding to an admiral's charge that he had "defiled the Soviet military" by bringing, of all things, a libel suit. There was a time when such behavior might have been rewarded with a stay in a psychiatric hospital, on the grounds that the patient had lost contact with reality. Now it was the Communists who were disoriented. Sobchak notes that the judge who received the case seemed completely "bewildered" by what was happening, and through three rounds of court proceedings, the defendant, Admiral Tomko, actually refused to appear. Six months later he was found guilty, obliged to pay damages and make a public apology.

The most important source of the conservatives' failure to weather the storms of perestroika, however, was not their lack of intellectual depth or their inexperience in fixing elections; it was their dogged inability to work together. Sobchak claims to have sensed this in his first days as a deputy to the People's Congress. He found that, while Andrei Sakharov's appeals to democratic principle aroused uncontrollable fury among hard-liners, his own narrower attacks on incompetent officials were considered almost acceptable by party conservatives. Many of them actually supported

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Sobchak's effort to deny confirmation to members of Gorbachev's cabinet. "Inner dissatisfaction with the Central Committee's policy," he concluded, "was already ripening in local party functionaries' souls."

For democrats trying to bring down the Communist establishment, these divisions within it were an enormous asset. How much they meant was vividly demonstrated for Sobchak and other Leningrad reformers in the fall of 1989, when the city's conservatives held a series of rallies to mobilize anti-democratic opposition to Gorbachev. The rallies were particularly significant because they were sponsored by Boris Gidaspov, the new Leningrad party leader whom Gorbachev himself had personally installed just months earlier. Had they evoked some show of support from leading conservatives elsewhere—at the time, Sobchak notes, Ligachev was still a member of the Politburo—these gatherings and the manifesto that they produced would have shown that those who stood to lose from perestroika were at long last prepared to defend themselves. But the support never materialized, and the first serious effort to organize conservatives came to nothing.

The same inability to work together was still more dramatically evident in the August coup and in the failure of Gorbachev's hard line last winter. Each of these efforts to stop the revolution had great potential appeal to a great many people, but neither managed to rally support when it mattered. If they were going to do their duty, those who were prepared to back a conservative alternative to perestroika needed to be told what was expected of them. Instead, only the very smallest group was in on the plot, and very little effort was made to elicit support from those who had not been involved in advance.

This reliance on a narrow circle of conspirators has been widely read in retrospect as a sign of confidence that others would simply follow orders. The deeper problem, however, may have been a lack of confidence, an uncertainty about who could be trusted, and for what. The plotters' anxiety about who was really on their side—even, in a sense, about what their side was—became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Too many people preferred to stand aside and see how things turned out.

While Soviet liberals were waging their assault on the Communist order, many Western observers argued that their internal divisions—personal, ideological, ethnic—made victory virtually unachievable. Soviet conservatives, by contrast, were thought to be united by the most powerful interest of all: preserving their power. Putsch week showed that this analysis was almost exactly backward. In making their last inglorious stand, conservatives were hobbled by countless small disagreements and mutual suspicions, and liberals were united by a single overriding goal. The struggle between them was decided by a group that Sobchak singles out for special praise: the "waverers," those who might easily have gone the other way. They did the right thing in August in very large part because conservatives had isolated themselves from their potential allies.

In the two and a half years between the elections of 1989 and the coup of 1991, Soviet liberals ceased to be amateurs. Popular politics proved to be as hard a school as any other, and those who emerged in the front ranks of the democrats were the ones who understood the new rules and knew how to play by them. From the first, Sobchak was at the very head of the class. In televised parliamentary debates his clear, forceful speaking style gave him national recognition. His lawyer's logic—even his professor's pedantry—helped him untangle procedural confusions that neither the Communists nor the reformers had confronted before. And for all his repetitive little sermons about the rule of law, he showed an instinctive feeling for power—an ability to talk unsentimentally to both allies and adversaries about where their true interests lay. Consider the delicate but unmistakable threat in Sobchak's letter to Gorbachev urging him to cooperate with a parliamentary inquiry into the Tbilisi massacre of April 1989: play ball with us, the letter read, and "you will not be blamed for having denied the Commission the opportunity to be given relevant explanations." Gorbachev agreed.

Since he seems so suited to politics, it is something of a surprise to find Sobchak returning again and again in this book to the distaste he feels for his new profession. His big fear, he says, is becoming a "pro." (The American translation, it should be said, is full of somewhat awkward slang, such as the reference to Gorbachev as "dead meat.") Sobchak wears his amateur status as a badge of honor, saying that "politics brings out the worst in people." His daughter, he confides, has noted the changes that his public career has already wrought in him: before becoming a politician, she told him, "you were kind."

Some of this hand-wringing is intellectual vanity. Sobchak is an arrogant fellow and he doesn't deny it. He frets that, as a politician, he is "wasting [his] potential," stunting his "personal and intellectual development." He grandly invokes classical authorities—Plutarch, Cicero, Tacitus—to explain his hope of leaving the political world just as soon as his labors as a citizen are done. In the meantime, what keeps him going, as he admits in explaining why he stayed in his first race, is "pride."

Sobchak's professed abhorrence of politics is a matter not merely of personal pride. There is also the pride of a real democrat who finds himself allied with those who are merely posing as men of the people. "In the initial stages of democracy," he sneers, "mere allegiance to the democratic camp was enough to earn someone a hero's laurels." Slowly, he thinks, those who are deceiving the voters will be found out: there are, after all, "horses for war and horses for parades." But for now scoundrels mingle in the democrats' ranks, and this "is nothing to brag about."

Sobchak is pained, and angry, that decades of dictatorship have made all political achievement seem the result of deal-making and connections. When he first came on the national scene, he was embarrassed to find that everyone wanted to know who his patron was. Perhaps, some whispered, Gorbachev himself was sponsoring him. Knowing his own worth, Sobchak resented the insinuation that he could only have advanced by becoming somebody's protégé. Not sur-

In Memorium Paul Celan

Lay these words into the dead man's grave
next to the almonds and black cherries—
tiny skulls and flowering blood-drops, eyes,
and Thou, O bitterness that pillows his head.

Lay these words on the dead man's eyelids
like eyebrights, like medieval trumpet flowers
that will flourish, this time, in the shade.
Let the beheaded tulips glisten with rain.

Lay these words on his drowned eyelids
like coins or stars, ancillary eyes.
Canopy the swollen sky with sunspots
while thunder addresses the ground.

Syllable by syllable, clawed and handled,
the words have united in grief.
It is the ghostly hour of lamentation,
the void's turn, mournful and absolute.

Lay these words on the dead man's lips
like burning tongs, a tongue of flame.
A scouring eagle wheels and shrieks.
Let God pray to us for this man.

EDWARD HIRSCH

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prisingly, then, he has a vision—a "Dream," he might have said—of a political order in which successful public service is not sullied by such suspicion. His stiff-necked ambition is to be seen as a "self-made man," accountable to the people but beholden to no one. Sobchak calls this an American idea, but what he seems to have in mind are the political institutions, half-democratic, half-aristocratic, of nineteenth-century Europe. He wants a government of notables.

Before the Soviet state collapsed, the honor and the incorruptibility of its opponents amounted almost to a political program. With communism defeated, however, their potency diminishes; they seem a residue of the amateurism with which Sobchak began his story. He and his fellow novices succeeded because they saw how Gorbachev had changed the rules. Now the rules are changing again, and just as quickly. The politics of integrity are yielding to the politics of interest. If the revolutionaries who brought down the old order are to build the "normal country" that they say is their goal, they will have to see what makes normal countries work. It will not be the same uplifting enterprise. In Sobchak's "new Russia," those who make politics their vocation will have to concern themselves less with disparaging patronage, and more with dispensing it.

STEPHEN SESTANOVICH is director of Soviet and East European studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The Big Hunger

BY BONNIE COSTELLO

Region of Unlikeness by Jorie Graham

(Ecco Press, 144 pp., $17.95)

"Poetry implicitly undertakes a critique of materialist values," Jorie Graham argued in her introduction to *The Best American Poetry 1990*. It competes with the comforts of "story," which sprays "forward over the unsaid until it [is] all plot," and it competes with the power of images, our culture's "distrust of speech and of what is perceived as the terminal 'slowness' of speech in relation to the speedier image as a medium of sales." Poetry has responded too timidly, she believes, to the challenges of commercial culture, and retreated into a narrow realm of trivial reflections, decorative forms, and platitudes.

Graham has taken it upon herself in her recent work to confront the power of plot and image head on. She has always been a philosophical poet. First she tested her metaphysics in a quiet, lyric space of nature and art, but lately she has plunged into the rush of history, memory, and contemporary life. Frequently she takes the artist and her own creative acts as the subject of her poems. What is the relation of language to its objects? How might language make a place for the spiritual rather than covering it over? How can poetry engage the world without succumbing to limitation? Increasingly such questions of poetic authority have become, for Graham, a matter of moral accountability, a question even of salvation, with the broadest cultural implications. Restless with the answers she found before, her vision has become more ecstatic, more omnivorous, more abstract in each of her four books. It has also become looser and more notational, less concerned with shapeliness and eloquence.

Graham has explained herself in rather urgent terms:

> I feel like I'm writing as part of a group of poets—historically—who are potentially looking at the end of the medium itself as a vital part of their culture—unless they do something to help it reconnect itself to mystery.... We need to recover a high level of ambition, a rage if you will—the big hunger.

She has identified her ambition with John Ashbery's, James Tate's, and Michael Palmer's—writers who approach their work not as artifacts or statements, but as performances. She has also cited the theatrical work of Robert Wilson as an inspiration, and she is translating Rimbaud. It is not hard to find structural and rhetorical similarities to these artists in Graham's recent work: darting images without explicit connections; a digressive, decentered approach to thought; the fragmentation of linear plots and arguments; indeterminate allegory; parodic language; fragmented allusion and misquotation.

These are all qualities commonly identified with postmodernism. But Graham has a fundamentally different orientation. She is much less interested in randomness and indeterminacy, in the material and the dynamic field of language. Her theatricality—the poem as drama, in which the poet is suffering protagonist before the chaos of the world—engages her in a search for meaning. For Ashbery or Tate, poetry is not a matter of metaphysics, of sustaining the rigor of truth or opening words to ecstatic vision. Poetry, for them, goes on inside language, where our clichés and routines are rearranged in tragic and hilarious new combinations that reveal our ways of knowing and relating. Graham's work is still driven by ideas, however subverted, and by metaphors of the spiritual.

Her first two books sit quite comfortably on the shelf alongside the late progeny of modernism: Mark Strand, Amy Clampitt, Charles Simic, Charles Wright, all of whom use sensual images to pursue the invisible. Like these writers, Graham eschewed the psychological and political emphasis of much poetry of the 1970s, focusing instead on the meditating mind and taking her cues from Keats, Rilke, Stevens. In her early work she limited meditation to individual objects of nature or art around which her thoughts could circle to form twisting, elegant designs:

I WATCHED A SNAKE

hard at work in the dry grass
behind the house
catching flies. It kept on
disappearing.
And though I know this has
something to do
with lust, today it seemed
to have to do
with work

Since then she has been working toward a new music of meditation that involves a deep skepticism and a constant check on the impulse toward story and interpretation. The poems raise questions, for reader and author alike, about the purpose of poetry: "And what is poetry now? What is it going to keep in life that life is ready to shake off?"

Not meaning, anymore, or order, or beauty, certainly not a story line or a controlling metaphor. Rather, poetry "wants to stick to the skin of the beast as it shakes," to register the force of being "until it is not a randomness anymore" but "a wave, making the whole love fit into its body." But sometimes one feels that the pleasures of poetry (its shapeliness, its precision) are neglected by Graham in the name of the higher conceptual risk of encountering the world without design, without the aid of a story

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or a statement about it. And sometimes one cannot help feeling that Graham's dedication to that risk may be a little disingenuous: that this poet, for all her commitment to the unmediated encounter, has in fact relinquished very little poetic authority.

In *Hybrids of Ghosts and of Plants* (1980), her first book, Graham didn't worry at all about fending off the lure of plot or the mesmerizing buzz of sound bites. Her hybrids of thought and image thrived in a well-weeded lyric garden. Many of her poems compared thought to nature, appreciating in the former all the fluency of the latter:

> A bird re-entering a bush,
> like an idea regaining
> its intention, seeks
> the missed discoveries
> before attempting
> flight again.

Contemplation offered occasions for epigram, gestures into the unknown that even in their ambiguity often had a certain verbal crispness: "only perfection can be kept, not its perfect instances"; "they say the eye is most ours / when shut, / that objects give no evidence / that they are seen by us." Large questions of perception, meaning, and identity could be stimulated by small things, taken one at a time, with little symbolic reserve: an artichoke, a chestnut tree, her mother's sewing box. If they lacked intellectual discipline, the cerebral notions in these poems were still a part of the experiment of seeing. We trusted this poet's move toward "pure idea" for the move was always made with a knowledge of its antithesis: "we have no mind in a world without objects."

In *Erosion* (1983), Graham's confidence in the authority of art was at its peak. She understood more clearly the iconic and sacramental nature of her mind, as she showed in coming to terms with the landscape of her childhood. (She was raised in Rome by an artist mother on the objects of ancient and high culture.) In these poems, art and sacred objects replace nature as the reigning muse. So often the detached observer, even the voyeur poking through blinds and noting neighbors' movements, Graham's stance as a beholder of works of art is an honest one, not just a device as with other poets. It leads her to many of her central themes: the dialogue of the body and the soul, the boundary between the eternal and the temporal, the mental and the natural.

The monumental works and the sacred objects are approached with simplicity and intimacy ("come, we can go in. / It is before / the birth of god"). The focus may shift, but we know where we are (sometimes down to the address: the Piazza di Spagna, the Quinta del Sordo, "down here this morning in my white kitchen"), even as the poetry complicates that concreteness. Especially after the casual assertiveness of *Hybrids*, the reflections that these precise images inspire are often puzzled and paradoxical ("As if flesh were the eternal portion after all, / here it is, your blunt modesty, pure, / even after a ton of dirt"). History, especially the Holocaust, begins to seep into the sacred ground of these poems, but it is absorbed rather than rooted out, or allowed to overwhelm the meditation. Although Graham risks sensationalism with some of her references to atrocity, most often she succeeds in presenting an honest tension between aesthetic patience and moral rage.

In *The End of Beauty*, which appeared in 1987, Graham largely abandoned the metaphoric and iconic methods, as well as the slow, winding syntax. In their place is a more immediate, urgent contemplation of figures from classical and biblical myth. Steeped in Milton, Keats, and Rilke, big hungerers all, Graham takes myths as allegories of consciousness, in fact as "self-portraits." These self-portraits render the lyric poet's psyche not as an integrated unit, but as a variety of dramatic tensions and repeated gestures (Eve taking the apple and offering it to Adam, Apollo pursuing the elusive Daphne, Orpheus longing for Euridyce, Demeter relinquishing Persephone, Penelope weaving and unweaving to avoid her suitors). Within these paradigms, Graham explores questions of freedom and necessity, of desire and resistance, in fresh ways.

The use of myth also allowed her to deal more directly with an idea that has always preoccupied her: the sense of an abiding wholeness behind a "veil" or "shroud" that is ripped to form a "storyline," to divide experience into "minutes," to frame it in limited "points of view." Myth helps us to understand that fragmentation of the world into discrete "finished things," constrained by shapes and boundaries, and helps us to think beyond it into a sacred, unfinished dimension. The poet of myth is more concerned to represent intense vision than achieved wisdom. And this intensity is typographically expressed: questions, dashes, ellipses, parentheses abound, and lines reach into margins.

The problem with *The End of Beauty* was that Graham had not found the formal or the linguistic means to sustain her prophetic project. Her mythic meditations aim for the intensity of *The Spiritual Exercises*, but the imagery is spare and non-pictorial. The poems are too infused with redundant abstractions and attenuated allegories to take physical or conceptual hold of us. Terms such as "gap," "delay," "plot," "rupture," constantly repeated, begin to sound like predictable buzzwords rather than like insights. The poet's language sags and loses direction: it can't sustain the ecstatic level. Too often it sounds like a bad translation of a Greek chorus ("why this sky why this air why these mountains why this sky"). Without a formal design to direct this stream of consciousness, the current dissipates. The aversion to "finished things" at the thematic heart of this book does not justify Graham's constant use of blanks ("that which sets the — in motion"; "mud, ash, —, —"). The poet's job, after all, is to give us the words and the pictures, however tentative, qualified, or figurative, for what we cannot name or see ourselves. Graham's blanks represent a poetic failure—honest, per-

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haps, but hardly satisfying, and certainly not redemptive.

Still, the major poem in *The End of Beauty*, called "Breakdancing," proved that Graham has aesthetic power equal to her prophetic ambition. A youth breakdancing on television gives the poet an image she can compare first to our own edgy, fragmented twentieth-century lives, but then also to Christ himself, who showed himself "in pieces" to St. Teresa. The poet manages to shift her rhetoric brilliantly, to chart her emotional flux and roving focus through media time, human time, sacred time. Her language can be jive ("What / is poverty for, Mr. Speed, Dr. Cadet, Dr. Rage, / Timex"), technical ("The robot-like succession of joint isolations / that stimulate a body in reaction to electric shock"), even homiletic ("staying alive is the most costly gift you have to offer Him"). These words rise to a poetic as well as a local rhetorical purpose.

Region of Unlikeness, Graham's new book, takes up many of the concerns of "Breakdancing," particularly its attention to the textures of contemporary life, to the media blitz and the terrorism that threaten our humanity and invade the quiet space of the lyric, demanding its renovation. As in "Breakdancing," the TV hums in many of these poems, the poet's own attention darting from image to image as if to compete with its mediating presence. Indeed, the poems seem at times like a grazing of channels, a desperate effort to forestall the reader's lapse of attention.

Where nature, painting, and myth each inspired previous volumes, the movie camera is the ambivalent muse now, both a threat to our sense of reality and an opportunity for new poetic strategies. Graham studied film at New York University, and her interest in the medium has surfaced in her verse before. But its overwhelming affect on contemporary consciousness—on our sense of history, of time and space, our conception of suffering—becomes a dominant theme in *Region*. Graham records the constant "click, click" of the mind taking up the world "in pieces." The mind inhabits a region of temporality, history, and representation "unlike" the wholeness and the presence that it longs to unveil.

Graham's poetic strategies are aimed at expressing and overcoming this condition. The poems cut, splice, fast forward, play, reverse, replay, and shift back and forth between independent scenes without making connections explicit. "Can I from down there, please, from Later On, / have a shot of a) the mall, b) flying the kite late August choppy wind, c) the men haying fast to beat the rain?" Ideas are like voice-overs, never quite meshing with images. The poet stars in and directs these movies, which are at least partly about their own making.

"Manifest Destiny," for instance, works like cinema montage, a pastiche of images outpacing narrative and argument. It begins, like so many movies, with a drive along a dusty, golden road (this one near Rome) through "shafts of morning light." The poet/director gives a visionary cast to the scene as the dust and the light mingle to throw up allegorical shapes, "all the contortions of the human form," anticipating subsequent images—"dusty money" and "gold bars," which later connect to prison bars, bills being paid in a restaurant, whores calling out of prison windows, meats on sale in a marketplace arcade. These are set against an ancient background of stone:

> —colonnades, promenades, porticoes,
> shadows of warriors, lovers and the various queens of heaven—
> arms raised holding stone fruit, lips parted uttering the stone word—the stone child in the stone arms.

A set of implicit prophetic themes emerges: an assault on materialist values in the face of "change," an anguished glimpse of human life reduced to "a handful of cloth, cash, skin," a criticism of the poet's own desire for "meaning" as a form of currency.

Dissatisfied with the narrow corner to which poetry has retreated, Graham seeks to achieve the stillness of the private, metaphysical vision within the harried institutions of our time: cities, nursing homes, extermination camps, prisons, psychiatric wards. The titles alone suggest something of her level of ambition and its increasingly ideological inflection ("Short History of the West," "Manifest Destiny," "From the New World"). Graham identifies history not only in images of the marketplace, but in riots and arrests, suicides and assassinations. Yet her effort to cut these images loose from sensational journalism can seem a little facile. The effect too often is merely to display a politically engaged and righteous sensibility, without attempting much historical scrutiny or political reflection. Though South African children, Holocaust victims, and AK-47s may flash in and out of her field of attention, the poems have less to do with events on the news (or even with history) than with the problems of consciousness that Graham loosely suggests may result in such events, or that go into shaping "the news."

Graham's "big hunger," then, has led her to somewhat contradictory impulses: to a confrontation with history and to a passion for the "imperial invisible," the wholeness behind the veil. Plenty of poets—Yeats, Pound, Eliot—have preceded her in this double vision, but in Graham it has resulted in some unsatisfying shifts of ground. Not wanting to reduce her images from history and experience to a political or psychological narrative (a "plot" or "story"), she swerves away from their implications. "Picnic," a poem that traces the fall from childhood innocence into the web of adult deceptions, abruptly turns at the end to become a poem contemplating being and truth ("the predicate—'is, is, is.' "). "From the New World," which begins with images of the gas chamber and hunted Nazis and which turns to maudlin images of her grandmother in a nursing home, ends up as a meditation on "like," on the problem of resemblance and naming, the wish for words that will not smother being. We are meant to feel that language and representation, unless constantly renewed, are—like the nursing home, like the gas chamber—forms of extermination. But surely distinctions in the order of being and the degree of atrocity ought to be made, if we are not to feel that all of this history really serves only as a trope.

We are prepared for these shifts to metaphysical questions, though, because they have preoccupied her in earlier books. A sequence of epigraphs—from Augustine, Heidegger, the Bible, Melville—serves as a "foreword" to *Region of Unlikeness*. They tell, in philosophic terms, a story of desire to recover lost presence, of thinking as a drawing toward what withdraws. The influence of the late Heidegger is especially strong, giving the poems an all too discursive and derivative character, despite the poet's suspicion of meaning ("The whole time looking for limitation, the place / without promise, where the adventure is finally over / and shape grips down"). This is nothing new in Graham. What is new is her effort to bring her desire for and resistance to meaning, interpretation, and judgment right up to the surface of the poems, to make that struggle their whole matter. Yet as she repeatedly treats the same themes, the digressions seem more to illustrate than to enact this struggle: matter "wants to remain asleep," change tries to arouse matter as she "lifts and drops each veil" of form, and matter continues to refuse her.

Still, some of the best poems in her new book tell a story of refusing the lure of narrative continuity in a way that centers the restless thought and sensation without reducing it to a discursive point. The parallel syntax and the often jerky,

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pounding, repetitive lines that portray the mind in motion can break out of abstraction when sufficiently imploded with metaphor, as in "What is Called Thinking." The poem opens simply enough: on a walk, the poet, listening to a Walkman, glimpses a deer. This initiates a meditation on the mind's relation to nature, and also an enactment of that relation. The "self-reflective strings of the / eighteenth century" heard from the Walkman become metaphors for our interpretive "voice-over" of observed reality, our wish to "brand" reality with our own identities. Graham then expands her explorations of the mind. The mind is a "transparent unmoving frenzy" that includes raw sensation and the desire to shape. An angel appears, a Promethean spirit of imagination and desire who converts nature into objects of thought, yet who laughs at his own error, is indeed robed in error. As Graham darts back and forth among images of the deer and her natural setting, the poet's "strings" of interpretation (the tape going on in her mind), and the daemonic angel that is larger than either, an exhilarating drama unfolds.

One feels the need to hear these poems read. Their force is performative, and they are very difficult to quote. Yet they are so burdened with doubts about eloquence in this age of distraction that moments of visual and linguistic pleasure are rare. When even seeing is upstaged by self-consciousness, when every act of perception or meaning becomes a noun ("my looking up"), a thing that blocks the view, it is difficult for the reader to enter the poem's world, despite the brusque imperatives ("Sit," "Blink," "Feeling OK?"). The abstractions begin to take on a life of their own ("the now," "the about," "the thing-in-us-which-trails-behind"), yet the allegories (with the exception of the Kafkaesque "At the Cabaret Now") lack either pictorial or intellectual vitality ("mother Matter—the opposite of In- / terpretation: his consort"). The poems seem to be about so much that they are about nothing at all.

What is the purpose of poetry? To stop and hold the hurry without extinguishing it, to put the world in parentheses and then let it out again, is Graham's current answer. It is not always a satisfying answer, nor is it an entirely honest one. History is not really embraced in its randomness in these poems. It seems, rather, to be selectively imported from the media for its emotional punch. And nature is rarely more than mere shorthand—mother bird and eggs, garden and secret lovers—a designation rather than a true evocation of raw being.

Graham's volume ends with Prospero laying down his magical garment. But how much poetic authority has Graham really relinquished in her project to encounter the world without the aid of a preconceived story or statement about it? Has she bravely stepped aside to let in the big vision, or are her tactics an abdication of a truly ambitious poetic project? She repeatedly interrupts her movies with protestations that she is only a camera: "Where would you go now?"; "shall we end on them?"; "a tracking shot?" But such interactive features of her poems are too often rhetorical, glib illustrations of the familiar point that we must oppose the "silky swerve into shapeliness" in the name of larger vision.

The poetics of failure that Graham constantly invokes has grown stale by now. Poetry must indeed sustain a reach beyond its grasp if it is to matter, and Graham's "big hunger" represents an inevitable, laudable shift away from the timid appetite of the much-spurned "workshop poem." Still, the reader's own big hunger should not be satisfied when it is served up imitations of Heidegger and allusions to the Holocaust in place of the poet's independent struggle to wrest beauty and meaning—however tentative and qualified—from the abyss of language and the randomness of experience.

BONNIE COSTELLO teaches English at Boston University and is the author of *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery* (Harvard University Press).

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BY MORTON KONDRACKE

Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny by Joshua Muravchik

(American Enterprise Institute, 269 pp., $24.95)

Now that the cold war is won, what should be America's purpose in the world? For more than a year, a lively debate has been under way on this subject, first launched in the foreign affairs quarterlies, later carried onto the op-ed pages and talk shows by budding xenophobe Patrick J. Buchanan, and now a raging topic in Congress, think tanks, and on the presidential campaign trail.

Buchanan, at one extreme, calls his doctrine "America First," borrowing (not at all uncomfortably) the slogan of the pre-World War II isolationists and appeasers of Hitler. He wants to bring all American troops home from abroad, have America's nuclear umbrella cover only America (and watch idly the wide proliferation of nuclear weapons), cancel foreign aid, close down the United States Information Agency, erect protectionist barriers to foreign imports, and lock out all but a trickle of immigrants. The libertarian Ted Galen Carpenter calls his own doctrine of withdrawal, which is a kind of free trade isolationism, "strategic independence," according to which the United States would terminate its security commitments, but avoid "a headlong plunge into economic autarky or intolerant nationalism."

Nobody any longer occupies the ground at the exact opposite pole from the isolationists. There are no more "bear any burden, fight any foe" interventionists. That view of American foreign policy went out of fashion after Vietnam, though it was partially revived by William Casey and Oliver North, who were inclined to "pull any trick, tell any lie" to defeat the Communist foe, and looked upon support for democracy mostly as window dressing to appease domestic critics. (Ironically, this crowd was cheered along in the Reagan White House by none other than Buchanan.) Another group in the Reagan administration, notably including Secretary of State George Shultz, came to favor a more moderate interventionism, whose goal was precisely the fostering of democracy; and they applied the principle to anti-Communist regimes, too, in the Philippines, South Korea, El Salvador, and Namibia.

A few "democratists" carry on in the Bush administration (the term is Buchanan's, and of course he means it as a slur), but the president and his principal aides subscribe mainly to the third major prescription for American strategy: realpolitik. Bush routinely identifies the spread of democracy as one purpose of the "New World Order," but his actual policies suggest that above everything he prefers the preservation of order among sovereign states, and he is not terribly

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The Israelis wanted the second phase of the Mideast Peace Conference to convene in the respective capitals of the involved parties. It seemed like a reasonable suggestion. After all, Jerusalem is only 150 miles from Damascus, Syria, and only 80 miles from Amman, Jordan. But the Arabs, did not accept that suggestion and insisted on a site as far away from home as possible. Why would they wish to impose such inconvenience on themselves? They believed that meeting with Israel in their respective capitals might by inference be considered as their recognition of Israel's existence.

What are the facts?

■ Despite decisive military defeats in the wars that they have launched against the Jewish state since the very day of its birth, the Arabs, in an almost unbelievable act of mental acrobatics, deny the existence of the country that has inflicted such severe and repeated punishment on them. When it becomes inevitable to mention the Jewish state it is referred to only as "the Zionist entity".

■ This non-acknowledgement of Israel's existence is not simply a matter of semantics. Arab maps do not show Israel, but a vast area, including Jordan, labeled as "Palestine". Cities such as Tel Aviv and Haifa simply don't exist. Arab school children, though imbued from earliest age with hatred of the Jews, have no "official" knowledge of the existence of Israel. They learn about it, one supposes, just as they learn about sex, by whispered comments in the schoolyard. Schedules of foreign airlines that show Israel on their route maps or that list Israeli destinations are not allowed in the countries. Foreign publications (among them, one regrets to report, such U.S. magazines as *Time* and *Newsweek*) print special editions for the Arab countries, since no publication carrying advertising of Israeli firms may appear in those countries. And, of course, tourists of any nationality may not enter most Arab countries if their passports shows evidence that the holder has ever visited Israel, the "non-existent country". Not too many months ago, a U.S. Senator was barred from entering Saudi Arabia, our "faithful ally", because of an Israeli visa stamp that had been placed in his diplomatic passport.

■ As an inducement to Israel for yielding land that is absolutely indispensable for the country's defense, the Arabs now and then offer the possibility of the "recognition" of Israel's existence. The sad and almost incomprehensible aspect of that is that many well-meaning people in the U.S., in other countries, and, yes, even in Israel believe that this might be an acceptable bargain for Israel. But Israel's existence is in no way dependent on the recognition of any Arab state. It's simple: Israel exists because it exists. Therefore, supposing that any meaningful face-to-face meetings came about and if, say, a Syrian diplomat should ask Israel what it would be prepared to "give" if Syria would consider acknowledging Israel's existence, Israel should reply that Israel might in turn consider acknowledging *Syria's* existence. Or, Israel could declare a boycott of the Arab world and could offer to relax or to rescind such boycott in consideration of parallel gestures by the Arabs.

The bizarre concept of Israel's "non-existence" has been around for over forty years. Many good people, including quite a few in Israel itself, have been led to believe that Israel should bring substantial sacrifices, even to the point of imperiling its own security and survival, in order to get the Arabs to acknowledge Israel's existence. It is often said that Israel needs to be "recognized" by the Arabs in order to "normalize her condition". But need not the Arabs, too, live in "normalized conditions"? And Israel is often promised that, in return for yielding vital strategic territory to the Arabs, she would be assured of "safe and secure borders". But don't the Arabs also need borders that are safe and secure? The Arab countries and much of the world have come to believe that peace is only good and desirable for Israel. But it is surely at least as important for the Arabs, who have lived through and have been bloodily defeated in five wars with Israel – the "non-existent country". Peace and prosperity can and will come to this troubled region only when the Arabs accept the reality of Israel's existence and negotiate with her openly and in good faith.

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interested in what kind of internal system those states have. He was willing to go to war against Iraq to protect the national integrity (and the oil reserves) of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, but he has done nothing to promote popular rule in those countries. When China ruthlessly crushed pro-democracy demonstrations, he refused even to protest. When Bush calls his policies "prudent," he gives that synonym for "wise" a bad name.

Joshua Muravchik is a democratist without apologies, and his book is the first of that school's interventions in the great post-cold war debate. Muravchik argues that a foreign policy based on either isolationism or realpolitik would represent a denial of America's historic mission to proliferate American-type freedoms in the world—and would also be a monumental strategic error. Among the advocates of "exporting democracy" as the main post-cold war purpose of American policy, Muravchik makes two signal contributions: first, he nimbly (though a little too uncomplicatedly) traces the history of democratic development in the world, establishing that for two centuries America has been the inspiration and the model for those seeking political and personal freedom; and second, he argues persuasively, against the assertions of both isolationists and realists, that the promotion of democracy is a feasible and an advantageous basis for American foreign policy in the years ahead. His book is weakened by his refusal to acknowledge that not all American interventionism in the last few decades has been for the purpose of spreading democracy, or good either for this country or for the countries we were "helping." He fails to appreciate that democracy-building cannot be America's sole purpose in the world. And he does not have much new to say about exactly how this country should go about promoting democracy.

What with Chinese students erecting a Statue of Liberty in Tiananmen Square, the former Soviet Union importing American advisers on everything from constitution-writing to currency reform, Vaclav Havel and Lech Walesa thanking the Voice of America and the AFL-CIO for keeping democratic hopes alive in Eastern Europe, and even African authoritarians like Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe talking about transitions to democratic capitalism, there can be little doubt about this country's recent influence on democratic development. What Muravchik adds is a historical survey going back to 1800, when there was one democracy in the world; to 1850, when there were three; to 1900, when there were seven;

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to 1950, when there were fifteen; to 1991, when (according to Freedom House) seventy-five of the world's 171 independent nations were free, constituting 25 percent of the world's population. Muravchik demonstrates that the United States has promoted this expansion throughout—sometimes by example, sometimes by military force (as in Germany, Japan, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Panama), sometimes by covert action (in postwar Italy, in Portugal in 1975, in El Salvador and Nicaragua in the 1980s), and through diplomacy and economic aid.

Muravchik argues convincingly that the outcome of American interventionism has been overwhelmingly positive, but he ignores cases where it has led to disaster. He mentions Vietnam only once in his entire book, skips past American support for scoundrels such as Batista and Somoza, and gives short shrift to misguided CIA plots in Guatemala, Iran, and Cuba. In his morphology of foreign policy theoreticians, Muravchik names three broad types—isolationists, realists, and idealists. He identifies two forms of idealist. One is the "pacifist idealist"—arms controllers and multilateralists—of which he disapproves. (Pacifism seems much too harsh a term for arms controllers, or at least for most of them.) The other is the "democratic idealist," which is his favored type.

Muravchik specifically rejects the late Robert Osgood's idea that there is such a thing as a "militant idealist." That is a dangerous error. Lyndon Johnson was a militant idealist. Oliver North is one. So are the people who advocate invading Iraq and setting up a "democratic" government, or suggest (as Ben Wattenberg did recently) that the United States should intervene militarily in the Philippines if its elected government were in danger of being toppled. Such militant idealists lend plausibility to Buchanan's claim that "democratists" favor a kind of reverse Brezhnev doctrine that holds that, once a country is a democracy, it can't be allowed to go undemocratic. In truth, few people advocate going to war to enforce such a doctrine. Still, that is no reason for complacency: the tendency to hyperidealism does need to be watched.

Muravchik makes a major contribution to the debate by countering the arguments of both isolationists and realists that the United States cannot and should not attempt to spread democracy around the world. Right-wing isolationists say that most of the world isn't ready for democracy. Left-wing isolationists say that when the United States intervenes abroad, it is not really to spread democracy, but to aid capitalist exploitation. Realist theoreticians (the most intellectually powerful of all, such as Hans Morgenthau, Henry Kissinger, and George Kennan) have argued that it is either impossible or that it is dangerous for the United States to base its foreign policy on moral principle. And still another school of realist (the "declinists" inspired by Paul Kennedy, in whose ranks many Democratic liberals are found) holds that it is simply too expensive for the United States, given its internal problems, to continue to exert itself in the world.

But the promotion of democracy, Muravchik argues significantly, should not be reduced to the lofty or quixotic pursuit of a noble moral cause, since it has desirable practical consequences as well. "The more democratic the world," he writes, "the friendlier America's environment will be." Realists can cite only one example of democracies waging war on one another, England versus Finland in 1941, which was an utterly exceptional case: Finland hated the Soviet Union more than Germany. Muravchik's subtle point is that the moral principle of democracy trains people in certain pragmatic ways of acting:

> Democracy is at bottom an ethical system, in which the citizens discipline themselves to the principle that it is better to decide things by the right means than to get their own way. Once individuals have internalized these ethics in their behavior within the polity, they can readily see that the same principle can apply to relations between states; namely, a state should compromise some of its regular goals or interests rather than resort to war, especially if it is dealing with states that are willing to behave in a like manner.

Against the declinists, Muravchik contends that making the promotion of democracy the "centerpiece of American foreign policy" actually "is the least expensive method of strengthening America's security," especially compared with the financial exertions of the cold war. He proposes increasing foreign aid by "several billion" to help Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, enlarging the National Endowment for Democracy (which assists civic groups, election monitors, labor unions, and publications) by several tens of millions of dollars, expanding American overseas broadcasting (especially to China) and book-publishing by "a few hundred million." This is not the most auspicious time in which to make proposals of largess abroad. But these are good and cheap and safe proposals.

Muravchik does not really confront potentially costly and dangerous contingencies. He says that the top priorities for the United States should be to democratize China and the former Soviet Union. But what if there is war between, say, Russia and Ukraine: Should the United States become involved if one is a democracy and the other is not? And if there is no war, just how much should the United States be prepared to spend to help the republics, and how should we proceed? And what if diplomatic pressure on China causes it to refuse to respect the West's wishes regarding the protection of Hong Kong's capitalist economic system and partly free political system: What should the United States do then? In the Middle East, should the United States pressure reactionary or despotic Arab states to democratize even to the point of destabilizing friendly regimes? And what do we do, say, if Islamic radicals take power and make those countries yet more undemocratic than they are now?

These are all-too-plausible scenarios—the last one may be playing out right now in Algeria—and a theorist of democratization must prepare against them. If, as Muravchik argues, the promotion of democracy is to become "the centerpiece" of American foreign policy, as containing communism was from 1945 to 1991, then the United States should be willing to devote vast quantities of GNP, and to risk the lives of its soldiers, to attain the purpose. Yet even Muravchik must recognize that insufficient political will exists for that. The reality is that, at best, the furthering of democracy will be "a centerpiece" of American policy, to be balanced with other priorities, including repair of our domestic strength, avoidance of war, protection of our national security (and that of our allies), and improvement of our competitive position in world trade.

Wherever possible, the United States should use international organizations and structures (the United Nations, the G-7, NATO, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the newly formed Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation Group, and GATT) to promote political and economic freedom. It should renew and expand its commitment to international law. Most of all, it should provide activist leadership, rallying allies, rewarding democratic and capitalist development, and imposing sanctions against despots.

Muravchik concludes his book with an appropriate sense of the historical moment. "For our nation," he writes, "this is the opportunity of a lifetime. Our failure to exert every possible effort to secure this outcome will be unforgivable." He is correct in his vision of the possibilities of a Pax Democratica inspired by America's example, but enthusiasm must not be our only guide. There must be some limits to how we "exert every possible effort" to bring democracy about. The U. S. government can and should be more "idealist" than the Bush administration is, but it needs to promote democracy as much as possible by plausible means. •

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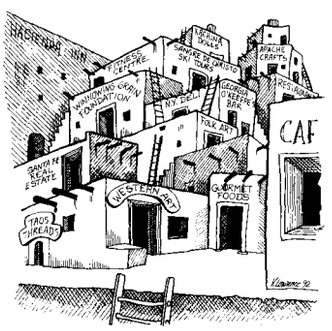
SANTA FE DIARIST

Miserabilism

THE ONLY TIMES I HAVE EVER skied were because I couldn't wriggle out of it. When I was 13, my high school persuaded my father to send me to the Austrian Alps for a week in a futile attempt at "character-building." Five years ago a bunch of friends similarly machoed me into a trip to New Hampshire in January. And over this Christmas break, at the jolly encouragement of friends who'd invited me to Santa Fe for the holidays, I went to Taos for a third attempt. I have to say that I still don't get it. In the first place, you look ridiculous. Even the most strenuous attempts to jazz up ski attire fail to overcome the inherent comedy of padded pants, enormously heavy boots, and headgear that prevents you from hearing anything. In Taos the streets were full of rich, apparently obese people, lurching around like Robocop on Benadryl, yelling at each other. In the second place, skiing itself offers very few attractions to the genuinely adventurous human being. It's really easy (most people can get the hang of it within a couple of hours) and requires minimal physical fitness. The only hard part—getting up the mountain—you accomplish by sitting on a padded ski lift. The whole exercise only becomes at all interesting when you start risking your life—an overrated activity that can, in any case, be accomplished in far warmer and cheaper climes. The scenery's a major plus, of course, but looking at it whiz past your goggles as you navigate the next mogul is not the most logical way to enjoy it. And hot tubs are far more fun if you're not ready to pass out from exhaustion by the time you get into one.

OR MAYBE I'M JUST GROUCHY from listening to too many Neil Tennant remixes. The most inspired product yet manufactured by the social science industry just arrived in the office: a paper from the *Journal of Economic Psychology* baldly titled "Pessimistic rumination in popular songs and newsmagazines predict economic recession via decreased consumer optimism and spending." By putting Phil Collins into regression analysis (something some of us have wanted to do for a long time), the study asserts, you can work out what the GNP will be in a couple of years' time. Will someone please inform Alan Greenspan? The problem is, of course, how to tell if a song is pessimistic. Professor Harold M. Zullow's solution to this conundrum is straightforward. Pessimists interpret bad events as "*stable* ('it's going to last forever'), *global* ('it's going to affect everything we do'), and *external* to themselves ('it's the situation we're in')." So, for instance, (no kidding) the 1963 song "Puff the Magic Dragon" is a real downer. It's a song in which

> Jackie, a human playmate of Puff's, has grown up and no longer comes to play. Puff's bad event is: "His head was bent in sorrow, green scales fell like rain. Puff no longer went to play along the cherry lane ... Puff that mighty dragon sadly slipped into his cave." The cause of this event is "Without his lifelong friend Puff could not be brave." This is a stable and global cause, likely to persist and affect many areas of Puff's life and is also moderately internal to Puff as he is unable to be brave without his friend.



The popularity of this melancholic tune, continues Professor Zullow, predicted bad economic times ahead, as depressed consumers took it out on the GNP. Zullow somewhat cavalierly ignores the possibility that the people who wrote, sang, and listened to "Puff the Magic Dragon" were so stoned they couldn't make it down to Sears, but, in general, it's about as plausible a theory as any other randomly sampled social scientist might come up with. I particularly like his interpretation of Creedence Clearwater's "Bad Moon Rising," in which a clear 87 percent of the lyrics were deemed pessimistically "ruminative," among which are counted "I know the end is coming soon" and "Hope you are quite prepared to die." (The cheery exceptions are: "Don't go around tonight" and "Hope you got your things together." Feeling better yet?) There's also something attractive about the theory's implications for politics. Jimmy Carter's defeat was not, it turns out, due to the Iranians or Paul Volcker, but to the neurosis of Gilbert O'Sullivan. Disco, it turns out, in one of those curiously revelatory twists, was, in fact, a dry run for Ronald Reagan. If only he or Sylvester could have known it at the time.

THE ROADS TO SANTA FE'S ST. Francis Cathedral on Christmas Eve were lined with brown, waxy paper bags, weighed down with gravel, inside which glowed small candles. These *farolitos*, as they're called, led to large bonfires at street corners, where people warmed themselves and chatted. The midnight mass was so crammed I couldn't see the altar and could only overhear the Eucharist. Oddly, it was a reminder of what the mass must once have been like: hidden, muffled, opaque. Staring into pillars or overcoats, we were reduced to the private rituals of faith, denied the comfort of a "performance," robbed of our familiar role as audience. The next day I stood outside and watched a Native American "buffalo dance" in Tesuque pueblo. It was a curiously similar experience: in a public space, a private ceremony, a shuffle across a muddy square, opaque to the tourists who watched, perhaps only slightly less opaque to those who participated. Like the mass, it didn't succeed in becoming a performance; and like the mass, the audience was reduced to self-consciousness. Only this time, we had no private understanding to fall back on, and they even less of a public faith to sustain.

FIVE MONTHS AFTER MY FATEFUL television purchase, I'm sorry to say that the only show I regularly watch is "Studs," Fox network's version of the dating game. The format is simple: three young women with big hair go out with two young men (often with bigger hair) and then appear on television to discuss their "dates." The assumption is that everybody has already slept with everybody else, but what turns "Studs" into the most sublime artifact of our time is that this is discussed at a level of scripted, pun-laden euphemism that would have made the Victorians blush with pride. Item: "I held on tight and let the roar of his rocket surge through me" (in reference to a ride on a motorbike). Item: "There's nothing cuter than a man who knows how to finger his puppet" (about a date in a toy store). Beneath this coy artifice, however, lies a darker reality. Before the show, each contestant has chosen another to pursue on a future date. At the end, each reveals his or her choice, in a brutal calling to account. Someone has to be rejected; it's only a matter of who. And as the show proceeds, the sexual politics builds to a grisly climax. The reason, it strikes me, that this show is so compulsive is that it's perfectly in sync with the decade: jaded, campy, self-aware, self-mocking, and at the same time very, very sad.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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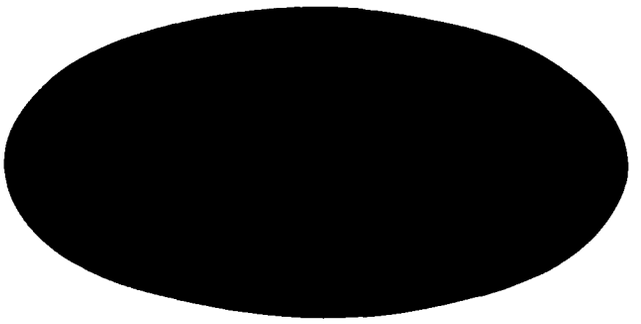
TUNE IN TO THE WORLD



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